

Pearls from Proverbs

Remove Not the Ancient Landmarks

Hardeman Nichols

Solomon was paramount among the sages of the Old Testament. His acclaim was noteworthy because Jehovah had appeared in a dream to Solomon and said, "Ask what I shall give thee?" And Solomon said,

I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in...Give thy servant therefore an understanding heart, to judge thy people...And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy word: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there hath been none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee (1 Kgs. 3:5-13).

[All Scripture references are taken from the American Standard Version unless otherwise noted.]

"God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled all the wisdom of the east...And he spake three thousand proverbs; and his songs were a thousand and five" (1 Kgs.

4:29-32). Many of these proverbs have been preserved for us in the Old Testament book of Proverbs. Among those is the one which serves as our text, "Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set" (Prov. 22:28). A similar proverb is also found in Proverbs 23:10: "Remove not the ancient landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless." The poor originally would separate their parcels of land from their neighbor's property with only a plowed furrow; but these were considered legal boundaries, even if they could not afford a more permanent demarcation such as a rock or a post.

Long before Solomon's day, landmarks had become a common practice as the way to define boundaries between neighbors. The *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* says, "Landmarks were frequently such movable objects as a stone or a post. Since a cunning and unscrupulous individual could take advantage of his neighbor by shifting the location of such boundary marks, thus robbing him of part of his means of support, such removal of landmarks was prohibited by Mosaic law" (475). A portion of God's promise to Abraham was to make of his descendants a great nation by protecting their rights to own their property, thereby "sitting under their own vine and their own fig tree." To assure that every family could keep their possession of property, God established a law that allowed the sale of property only until each year of Jubilee, which came every fifty years. The price of the land would be partially governed by the years remaining from the sale until the fiftieth year from the last Jubilee. At each Jubilee, every parcel was returned to the family that originally received it by the casting of lots when they came out of Egypt. The respect they were to show for this system of personal property rights was enforced by marking the perimeters of their land estates

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with permanent landmarks. To remove one of them was considered a very serious crime. Moses had warned, "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbor's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen" (Deut. 27:17). He had said earlier, "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbor's landmark, which they of old time have set, in thine inheritance which thou shall inherit, in the land that Jehovah thy God giveth thee to possess it" (Deut. 19:14).

This law in Israel was God's method of preserving each exact parcel of land for every original family, and would prevent many quarrels and much legal wrangling over boundaries, for the threat of God's wrath was upon any who violated its sacred precepts.

Hundreds of years before Solomon wrote his proscription, and long before Moses wrote his warnings for Israel, the boundaries of neighbors were similarly protected. During the Patriarchal Age, Job declared his innocence by arguing his respect even for the property of the poor: "There are that remove the landmarks; they violently take away flocks and feed them. They drive away the ass of the fatherless; they take the widow's ox for a pledge" (Job 24:2-3). Job had declared that God knew that he was innocent, "But he knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

HOSEA'S SPIRITUAL APPLICATION OF THE LANDMARK PRINCIPLE

The prophet Hosea made an unforgettable application of this principle of disrespecting landmarks. He had accused both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah of being "revolters" and shamed them: "Their doings will not suffer them to turn unto their God, for the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not Jehovah"

(Hos. 5:1-10). In verse 10, God said, “The princes of Judah are like them that remove the landmark: I will pour out my wrath upon them like water.” He was borrowing His familiar warning—“Do not to remove the ancient landmark”—and He applied it to the contempt that His people portrayed for His Law, which was like the landmark in principle.

God has shut His people in with boundaries and His Law is to be obeyed! When His commandments are flaunted, ignored or replaced by human “wisdom,” it is more repulsive to God than was Israel’s removing of ancient landmarks between their neighbors. If removing the landmarks between men was such an egregious transgression, how much more offensive must it be for one to remove the divine boundary limits established by God!

In the previous chapter, Hosea had said that God had brought a “controversy” (meaning “a lawsuit,” 4:1) against His people. God’s plaintive cry included, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children” (Hos. 4:6). The charge that Jehovah makes for their grievous sin is, “They break out” (Hos. 4:2). It was as if God’s own people were defiantly crying, “Don’t fence me in!”

GOD HAS FENCED US IN

God has always commanded mankind to keep His laws. It was true when God created the first man and woman. He placed them under law: “And Jehovah God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17). It

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was the saddest day of human history when Satan coaxed their rebellion. The devil convinced them to say to God, "Don't fence me in."

When Israel was given God's Law through Moses, they were emphatically warned to obey His precepts. Jehovah required strict obedience to His Word: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2). Again, we read, "What thing so ever I command you, that shall ye observe to do: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deut. 12:32).

When Israel removed God's landmarks of the Law, they were in essence saying, "Don't fence us in." God sent His prophets to urge them to return to the ancient boundaries of His Word. The prophet Jeremiah pleaded with the people, "Thus saith Jehovah, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls: but they said, We will not walk therein" (Jer. 6:16). In his Proverbs, Solomon also recorded the warning of Agur, "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Prov. 30:6).

We live in the Christian dispensation today; and God now speaks to us by the greatest Spokesman ever sent to mankind, and He requires us to obey Him implicitly. The voice of God has spoken from heaven and commanded, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5). The Son of Man Himself who gave the Great Commission said, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things

whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:18-20).

In his second gospel sermon in the book of Acts, Peter quoted a prophecy from Deuteronomy 18:15-18, and said, "Moses indeed said, A prophet shall the Lord God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me; to him shall ye hearken in all things whatsoever he shall speak unto you. And it shall be, that every soul that shall not hearken to that prophet, shall be utterly destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3:22-23).

REMOVING CHRIST'S LANDMARKS IS SERIOUS SIN

It is more serious for one to defy Christ than it was for Israel to disobey Moses.

A man that hath set at nought Moses' law dieth without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:28-31).

We must obey Christ's commandments to be saved. "Though he was a Son, yet learned [He] obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:8-9). That is why He promised, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be

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saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47).

On the day of Pentecost, Peter and the apostles began to preach the glorious message about the risen Lord. He commanded those who heard the sermon to believe the facts about Jesus:

Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:36-38).

Realizing the necessity of obeying the commandments of Christ, the text continues, "They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers...And the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved."

Let us emphasize the fact that the New Testament records the beginning of the church which Jesus built in that second chapter of Acts, and commands us to obey whatever Jesus commands. Upon doing His will, one is assured of the blessings of salvation in Christ, and He has promised to bless us in this work unto the end of the world. Listen again as our Lord said, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye

therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:18-20).

SOME HAVE REMOVED THE LANDMARKS OF NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY

The apostle Paul foretold the fact that some would remove the boundaries of the faith. He said,

But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men, that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by them that believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

This passage declares there is a standard of Christian doctrine and we are not to fall away from the faith. Jude also underscored this truth: "I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

Jesus had emphasized the necessity of obeying His commandments. He said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt 7:21-23). Hear His rebuke of all who refuse to respect His landmarks of faith: "Ye

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hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching as their doctrine the precepts of men" (Matt. 15:7-9).

The New Testament closes with a final word of warning, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18-19).

THE BIBLE IS OUR "FIELD NOTES"

We have clearly seen from these Scriptures (and there are many more like these) that the Bible is given to be our "field notes." By using it, we can find the proper "beginning point" or corner. Jerusalem is the place to begin running the line of established Christianity, for Isaiah had prophesied,

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1-3).

In Acts 11:15, Peter referred to the previous events of the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and he designated it as "the beginning." It was the beginning of the church that Jesus had promised to build (Matt. 16:18), and the gospel of Christ began to be preached in His name from that occasion (Acts 2:22-36).

SOME ANCIENT TRUTHS ARE BEING MOVED TODAY

There are old landmarks being removed by many today, but they should not be moved. They are the lines and boundaries of Christianity and they must not be changed. Many no longer believe in the virgin birth, or the miracles that were performed by Jesus Christ (John 20:30-31). We must stand firmly on the facts of the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ, for these are the facts of the gospel (Gal. 1:6-9). We must also stand foursquare upon obedience to the gospel plan of salvation, based upon the atoning blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:26-29), as well as upon the fact that Jesus built but one church over which He is the only head (1 Cor. 12:20; Col. 1:18).

Though some today are removing the modesty and purity of life that the gospel demands, we continue to plead for this in all of its powerful influence. "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27). John pleaded, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain-glory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:15-17). That is why

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Paul urged, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1-3).

For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works (Tit. 2:11-14).

Let us never remove the landmarks of a Christian home based upon the love of Christ, where one husband and one wife are bound for life (Matt. 19:1-9). The Bible says,

Wives, be in subjection unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the saviour of the body. But as the church is subject Christ, so let the wives be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Even so ought husbands to love their own wives

as their own bodies. He that loveth his own wife loveth himself: for no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as Christ also the church (Eph. 5:22-29).

CHANGE AGENTS ARE REMOVING THE ANCIENT LANDMARKS

We are faced today with a renewed menace from change agents, who under the guise of unity and peace are removing the landmarks of fellowship. Simply exchanging Bibles, with those who have digressed from the landmarks of New Testament authority for all that is done in worship, may appeal to some; but it is only an empty gesture unless it is accompanied with agreement to abide in the doctrine of Christ. The Word has sufficient and compelling warnings such as 2 John 9: "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son." Some attempts have been made to dismiss this with a wave of the hand, saying, "Oh, that has to do only with the teaching about His deity discussed earlier in the same letter." But that only delays the inevitable for only a moment. Jesus said that one who admits His deity is bound to also obey His commands. He said, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord?... " – that is, why do you admit my deity? – "and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

True fellowship requires us all to stand upon the New Testament landmarks of worship. As with all that He commands us to do, we can have His blessings by doing precisely His will. "If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have

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fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:6-7).

Let us all with one accord heed the landmark principle which was stated by the prophet long ago in the call of Isaiah 55:7-9, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thought; and let him return unto Jehovah, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

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Hardeman Nichols preaches for the Pleasant Grove church of Christ in Dallas, Texas.