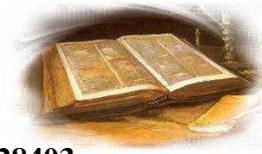


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Removing An Ancient Landmark - By Jimmy Tuten, Mobile, Alabama

Many times the Bible speaks of removing boundaries (**Prov. 22:28; Deut. 19:14; 27:17**). Solomon said emphatically, "remove not the old landmark. . ." (**Prov. 23: 10**). A landmark was considered a sacred thing that helped perpetuate family holdings and was used as a means of protection against deceit, error, and confusion. It might be a rock, a post or a metal stake. Sometimes they get lost, misplaced or obscured. For example, a metal stake in one corner of our property line that the church owns has been determined to be completely engulfed in an oak tree. The tree simply grew around it! We know where the line is, but we can't see the stake. Therein lies the purpose of a landmark, i.e., to help one know where the boundary is and to help us identify an area where we have liberty. For example, I have the liberty to mow the grass up to the property line between my property and that of my neighbor's, but no further. He might like me to mow his side of the grass, but I am not at liberty to do so!

When Jehovah sets a landmark in His Word, that means that there are limitations and restrictions attached to it. I have the right and the privilege to move within a certain area of God's Word, but I cannot tamper with it, nor change what is set. I can move only within the area or boundary set by God (**Tit. 2:1; 2 Tim. 1:13**).

Some Examples

In **1 Kings 12:28-30** we have the example of Jereboam changing things set by God. He changed relating to the worship of Jehovah: the place of worship (Dan and Bethel), the priesthood, the period of worship and even the object of worship. He should never have moved God's landmark. **Matthew 15** records the fact that the Jews in Christ's day changed God's law regarding one's duty to parents and their devotion to God ("with their lips," **vv. 3-9**). Again, stakes were moved. False brethren spied out the liberty of first century Christians by moving God's boundary regarding

circumcision (**Acts 15; Gal. 2:1-5**). The fact that there are ancient landmarks of doctrine goes undisputed (**Jude 3; Tit. 2:1**). It is obvious though, that some have been converted to and are following landmarks that are really obstructions standing in the middle of the road of truth! The greatest need among our brethren in the area of doctrine is to clear away the rubbish of some current thinking on the original truths of the New Testament! I know that to do so is to bring certain consternation that will shock and disturb us. But some of us need to be jerked into reality when it comes to attitudes toward God's Word and each other. It is never right to accuse those who are trying to be faithful with removing ancient landmarks, when they are only taking away later accretions. Regardless of the obscurities that men have placed in the way, we cannot dispense with the truly ancient landmarks of God's Word. To forsake God's Word in any area is to forsake the authority behind it (**Jn.12:48; Mk.7:9**).

The Landmark Of Sin And Mercy

There is one area where the process of removing the boundary of sound doctrine is in great suspect. Things that are uncertain in sound regarding sin and mercy are rippling through our ranks with discouraging shockwaves. Some

have loosed themselves from the boundary marker of God's Word and appear to be floundering. The only solution lies in going back to and holding to the pattern of God's Word. God has definitely driven a stake, or landmark, regarding sin and mercy. The floundering upon the waves of uncertainty comes not from the lack of a landmark about sin, but from our own rationalizations. The landmark appears obscured and hidden to some, but it is there nonetheless. Some have simply failed to hold to it.

In 1953 I sat in a class taught by Homer Hailey. We were discussing the "way that is right and cannot be wrong" concept as opposed to what "appeared reasonable, though uncertain." What he said was so deeply burned into my mind that I have never forgotten it, nor strayed from it: "Boys," he said, "when you find yourself wandering in the area of uncertainty, always come back to the stake of what God has said and you will never believe nor teach false doctrine." That advice needs to be passed on. I say with no intended disrespect toward any preacher: there are some who need to go back to the landmark about sin that God set 1,900 years ago. I am hearing things about sin and mercy that cannot be found in the Word of God! Some of these things may sound reasonable, but are they

scriptural? I judge no man, but from what I am hearing ancient landmarks are being uprooted, even though pleas of "that's not what I mean" are being heard. If some of our preaching brethren do not believe what they are saying, then they should not say it! The precious body of Christ must not be ruptured by statements and clichés that are divisive, regardless of our right to say them. Brethren, I beg you and I implore you, place your hand on the stake of God's teaching about sin and forgiveness, and desist from making the reasonableness of certain conclusions that are questionable disruptive to our peace and harmony. Look with me at God's teaching (an ancient landmark) concerning sin. Can we alter or move the stake?

Sin And Forgiveness According To The Bible

(1) What Sin Is And Is Not. The definition, "missing the mark," generally defines sin. The Bible describes it as "all unrighteousness" (**1 Jn. 5:17**) and "lawlessness," or being without law (**1 Jn. 3:4**). While there is a great deal said about "sins of weakness," all sin reflects weakness (cf. **Gal. 6:1**, "overtaken"; **1 Cor. 3:3**, "manner of men"; **1 Jn. 2:16**, "lust," etc.), there are sins of omission (**Jas. 4:17**) and commission (**Rom. 7:14-25**). The Bible speaks of rebellious sins that would involve unrighteousness,

lawlessness and commission (**Heb. 10:26**). Sins of ignorance (**1 Tim. 1:13**) and violations of conscience are likewise categories of sin (**Rom. 14:23**). But nowhere does the Bible speak of sin as depravity, nor due to depravity though some brethren border this concept in that they teach "a Christian will sin daily" (cf. **1 Jn. 2:1-2**). Too, the New Testament does not speak of "momentary sins," "minor sins," "everyday sins," or "incidental faults." To speak of sin as "incidental" or a "good deed left undone because of circumstances beyond our control" is to remove an ancient landmark (Vanguard, Vol. 8, No. 3, p. 19).

(2) The Consequences of Sin. Sin alienates (**Eph. 4:18**), causes one to be "dead" (**Eph. 2:1,5**), and separates from God (**Isa. 59:2**). One may not understand when a sin separates (**1 Jn. 1:8**), or how a sin (darkness) can exist while one walks in the light (**1 Jn. 1:7-9**), or even how long mercy is extended between the time we commit a sin and the time we confess it, but his lack of understanding gives no right to advocate that some sins do not separate. This would be removing the landmark!

(3) Attitudes Toward Sin. God hates sin because He is light (**1 Jn. 1:5**), He is just (**Rom. 3:26**) and His very nature causes Him to disapprove of evil (**Hab. 1:13**).

Since God Almighty hates wickedness (**Psa. 11:5**), should we not hate it as well (**Psa. 119:104**)? Do we really understand that the very nature of God causes Him to be grieved when we sin (**Psa. 95:10**)? Can we not see that we are to walk in the light even as He is in the light (**1 Jn. 1:5-7**) and that we are to be holy like the Father (**1 Pet. 1:15**)? Why then do some minimize sin with speculative reasoning? Our attitude toward sin should be to abhor it and abstain from every form of evil (**Rom. 12:9**; **1 Thess. 5:22**). This "even as he sins" business that we are hearing so much advocates automatic coverage of certain sins (ignorance and weakness) committed by the Christian. This is the removing of a landmark. God forbid!

(4) One Sin Condemns. If one sin that is not forgiven by repentance and confession (conditions that God has laid down) does not condemn the Christian, then please tell me: how many must I commit before I am condemned? Are we going to use a pen knife on **James 2:10**? Are we going to ignore the one sin condemnation of Ananias and Sapphira (**Acts 5**), Simon the sorcerer (**Acts 8**), etc.? There is not a man alive who has the right to say that God will not condemn a Christian over one sin. To do so is to tamper with ancient landmarks.

(5) The Solution For Sin. "He that covereth his transgressions, shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsiketh them shall obtain mercy" (**Prov. 28:13**). Blessed indeed is the man "whose iniquities are forgiven" (**Rom. 4:7-8**). God has driven two markers or stakes regarding the boundary of forgiveness for the alien sinner and the Christian who errs. He tells the alien to believe on His Son (**Jn. 3:16**), to repent of his sins (**Acts 17:30**), to confess with his mouth his faith in Jesus Christ (**Rom. 10:10**), and to be baptized for the remission of sins (**Acts 2:38**). This is what God says and I preach it regardless of the reasonableness of God showing mercy to the alien who dies on the way to the creek before he is

actually immersed! God has not given me the right to say that He saves the person who sincerely tries to do God's will but somehow fails to do so! Whether Jehovah does or does not extend mercy in this situation is the business of Deity and I will not remove the ancient landmark by postulating my opinion. **** **Continued In Next Weeks Bulletin** ****

