



“God’s Ancient Landmarks”

Part II
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Thank you for joining us today. Last week, we began a study on landmarks. We noted that in the Bible, property lines were marked by stones. Those stones were called ancient landmarks. When the Israelites inherited the land of Canaan, the land divided among them was marked off by divinely sanctioned boundaries or landmarks and the people were not allowed to move them. There are several warnings in the Old Testament about doing so and thus infringing on one’s property.

Deuteronomy 19:14 “Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour’s landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the Lord they God giveth thee to possess it.”

Proverbs 23:10 “Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless.”

The lines that were determined in the beginning were to be seen as sacred and binding. Of course, in the literal sense, Christians are not allowed to steal what doesn’t belong to them today either. And God’s people today don’t occupy a particular piece of geography, and no earthly property holds any spiritual significance to the church. Rather, any landmarks that we should be concerned about today are spiritual in nature. The church was circumscribed by lines that were drawn by God, and the Holy Spirit in the word of God laid down certain landmarks that we are not at liberty to move any more than they were allowed to move those literal landmarks in days gone by. Today, we want to continue by pointing out some more ancient landmarks that God has set and that people have ignored and moved today.

Proverbs 22:28 “Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.”

God forbade the Israelites from defrauding their neighbors, especially the poor, and moving these boundaries to their own advantage, in essence, stealing land and claiming for themselves something that did not belong to them. But we do well to remember that God has laid down some spiritual

boundaries for us to respect today as well. We are not free to think and do as we please as far as God is concerned. Rather, God's truth draws some lines on the ground that separate one thing and one person from another, and those lines are not to be blurred nor moved.

Last week, we talked about the line of salvation; that there is a definite line of demarcation between being lost and saved. You're either in sin or you're saved from sin. You're either in Christ or you're out of Christ. You're either a servant of sin or a servant of righteousness. There is a definite line between the two. There is no middle ground, there is no such thing as being "sort of saved" or "partly saved and partly lost." You're either lost in sin or you're saved in Christ.

So, there must be a dividing line. Since forgiveness from sin and salvation from sin takes place in the mind of God and not ours, God is the one who has laid down that line. We don't place it where WE want it, but God has placed it where HE desires. Salvation is on God's terms and not ours. Jesus Christ placed that line at the point of obedience to the gospel message.

Hebrews 5:9 "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;"

Jesus sent His apostles into all the world preaching the message of salvation. This is what He told them to preach:

Mark 16:16 "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

You see, that is where Jesus placed the boundary. Baptism into Christ is an ancient landmark when it comes to salvation, as are faith, repentance, and confession. All are necessary to enter into Christ and receive forgiveness through Him. But people moved that landmark a long time ago. You might say they broadened the border of the kingdom by moving the landmark closer to the center and away from God's sovereign will by placing baptism well inside the kingdom instead of where God established that landmark, and that is at the gate to the kingdom.

Then, we left off talking about the landmark of acceptable worship. Worship is directed by God and not invented by man. It never has been invented by man. For God to receive and accept our worship, it must not only come from a pure heart, but must also be according to His word.

Colossians 2:23 "Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship..."

That worship which comes from the mind and will of man Paul refers to as "**will worship**." That means that we are limited in what we may practice by what God has ordained and authorized. What God has ordained to do, we must do--no more and no less. Now, we may have liberty in how we carry out that command of God as long as God has not specified otherwise. But we have no right to set aside the divine pattern and change what God's word has set forth and what He has specified. Neither do we have the right to invent means and methods of worship and offer it to God when God has been silent about such.

We mentioned last week how that Nadab and Abihu were killed when they offered to God what Moses called "**strange fire...which [the Lord] commanded them not**" (**Leviticus 10:1**). We also noted that Cain's sacrifice was rejected by God because it was not what God had earlier specified or revealed (**Genesis**

4:3-5). God said the offering was to be a blood sacrifice, but Cain substituted something else. When we offer something to God that He did not ask for in His word, or if we set aside the divinely given pattern and worship in a way other than what God specified, then we offer wrong and futile worship to the Lord. For example, God's word commands Christians to sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:19 "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

Colossians 3:16 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,"

That is the command that's given in the New Testament to Christians. It says nothing about using a mechanical instrument to worship God. In fact, history makes it rather clear that the early church of the New Testament did not use any such instruments in their assembly. Now, they were used for temple worship under the Old Testament; that's apparent from the writings of the Old Testament and from history. But conspicuously, they disappeared from the New Testament church and did not reappear until about 600 years after the apostolic church. That ought to tell us something. What are people doing today when they bring instruments which the New Testament does not command or authorize into the worship of the church? Well, they're moving an ancient landmark.

The first century church met in one assembly for worship and edification.

I Corinthians 14:23 "If therefore the whole church be come together into one place..."

Men only did the teaching, with women forbidden from preaching or teaching.

I Corinthians 14:34 "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak..."

I Timothy 2:12 "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

But 1,700 years later, that ancient landmark was moved with the introduction of the Sunday School and its divided assembly and its women teachers. Today, it's not that uncommon to see women filling church pulpits. In fact, most of the ancient landmarks governing the work and worship of the church have been removed in the nearly 2,000 years of the church's history.

We contend that the apostolic scriptures are still the guideposts, the landmarks for rule and authority for the faith and practice of the church of Christ today. As the religious world continues to run amuck and drift farther and farther away from any semblance of the apostolic first-century church, don't you think it's about time that we need to stop and return to the ancient landmarks where God set them? God's word says what it says and it means what it means, and we don't have a right to simply ignore or circumvent the Bible, or act as if it is irrelevant to the work, worship and the lives of Christians today. Many have moved the ancient landmark of worship when we need to, as the old song says, *Go back to the old landmark.*

Well, thirdly, the ancient landmark of **fellowship** has also been moved. Perhaps when you hear the word *fellowship*, you can smell the coffee and taste the donuts, but that's not really what the Bible means

when it uses the word. It can refer to *social interaction*, but really that's not the core meaning of the word in its application in the Bible. It does not merely refer to spending time together. *Fellowship* primarily means *a partnership or a joining together in the work of the church*.

This has become a more complicated subject for us today because there are literally hundreds of varying religious groups that call themselves "churches," all claiming to belong to Christ. We know that's not what Jesus intended when He established His church. He only said that He would build one.

Matthew 16:18 **"...and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."**

He didn't say that He would build a hundred churches or hundreds of denominations; He said **"I will build My church."** That church is made up of people who have been baptized into Christ for the remission of their sins and have thus been added to the church by Christ Himself.

Acts 2:38, 47 **"...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."**

You don't do the adding, I don't do the adding, some preacher doesn't do the adding, and a board of deacons doesn't do the adding. The congregation doesn't even do the adding. Christ adds people to the church when they are baptized into Christ, upon their faith and repentance, for the forgiveness of their sins. Now, those Christians whom we have just described are then all part of local congregations of believers who follow the teachings of Christ and His apostles.

Ephesians 2:20 **"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."**

Not only that, but those churches are of **"like precious faith."**

II Peter 1:1 **"Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:"**

I Corinthians 4:17 **"For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church."**

I Corinthians 1:10 **"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."**

So, Christians are to embrace a common faith. We are to strive for a common faith and a unity in the scriptures. We may differ in matters of human opinion, but in matters of obedience to Christ, we are to be one mind. In matters of the gospel, we are to be of one mind. We've essentially forgotten all about that today, especially with the rise of postmodern philosophy, which says that truth is unknowable and unattainable. A great many people have applied that false philosophy to the word of God and have basically embraced all out ecumenicalism, claiming that we really can't even be sure what God meant in His word, therefore we have to accept nearly all ideas and all groups of people who claim to believe in God and who we believe are sincere.

Friend, that may sound good, but the Bible does not teach that. The Bible does not teach ecumenicalism. What the Bible teaches is unity, and there is a vast difference between the two. An old-time preacher once said, “You can take two cats and tie their tails together and you’ll have union, but you won’t have unity.” Take Paul’s admonition, for example:

Ephesians 4:1-2 “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;”

We like that part. And Christians are, rightfully, encouraged to love one another and be forbearing and patient with one another as we grow and walk in the Lord. That is very true. But that’s not where Paul stops. Read on:

Ephesians 4:3-6 “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

Here, Paul shows that there is a basis for unity. There are things in which we find unity as believers in Jesus Christ. It’s not just a matter of us deciding to embrace one another without any kind of theological conditions. Rather the Lord HAS placed certain conditions upon the fellowship of those who claim to follow Him. Are Christians to embrace everyone who claims to believe in God or have any kind of religious thought or practice? Or is there a basis for fellowship or partnership among people? Is there an absolute basis for that? John helps us to answer that question.

I John 1:5-7 “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 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 fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

You see, that’s what we might call *a triangle of fellowship*.



First of all, Christians are in fellowship with God, **“if we walk in the light, as he is in the light.”** Is it up to us to establish the basis for fellowship? What does he say? He says that the basis for our fellowship is with God, and that’s based upon whether we **walk in the light**. If we walk in the light—that is, the light of Christ, the light of truth—then we enjoy God’s fellowship. But if we walk in darkness, we are not in fellowship with God.

Now, what if you and I both walk in the light? What if you’re walking in the light of what God’s word says and teaches, you’ve embraced the truth as God’s word teaches it, and at the same time I walk in the light? Then we both not only have fellowship with God but with one another as a result.

Well, what if one of us decides NOT to walk in the light? What if we walk by our own opinion or some other human opinion, tradition, creed, or so forth instead of what the Bible says about Christ and His church and all the things that are germane to our salvation? If one is walking in the light and the other is walking in darkness, what's the result? One of us is not in fellowship with God, and consequently, we would neither be in fellowship with one another.

I realize there are matters that pertain to the growth and spiritual maturity of individual Christians. It's not as simple or cut and dry to say that Christians will always agree on every single matter that may arise. But friends, the gospel is non-negotiable. The plan of salvation and what we must do to be saved are not matters of indifference or opinion (**Acts 16:30**).

The corporate work and worship of the church are not matters of *whatever you think or whatever I think, and just live and let live*. You see, when churches depart from the faith—and sadly, oftentimes they do—or when churches claim to be churches, never having really embraced the faith—and there are many that fit that description—they are not walking in the light of truth and right. When churches cast aside apostolic traditions and Biblical authority for their own traditions and creeds instead, they are not walking in the light, and Christ does not desire for fellowship to exist among such people when that's the case. What God desires is for people to repent and return to the truth so that fellowship can then exist.

Friends, in this day of ecumenicalism, the thought that one church is just as well and good as another and it really doesn't matter, is NOT true. We need to be reminded that God set the landmark and boundary of fellowship and that fellowship results from mutual believers walking in the truth. What we need to be doing is not holding hands with those who practice error in the interest of union; rather, we need to be striving to find and follow the Bible's truths so we can enjoy true unity.

I lament the fractured and broken state of the religious world as much as anybody, but the answer is not to lower God's standard of truth and move the ancient landmarks in order to embrace more people as they are. That's not God's answer to unity. The answer is for us to desire and strive for truth, unite over the truth, and love and practice the truth because God limited the fellowship of His church to those who are of the truth and follow the truth.

Finally, there is the ancient landmark of **holiness**. That is the boundary that divides the kingdom of light from the kingdom of darkness. Did you know that there is still to be a stark difference and a definite line between the church and the world? People should be able to look at the church and see a dramatic difference from the culture of sin and unrighteousness.

Romans 12:2 “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...”

That literally means *do not let the world put you into its mold, but you be changed by the renewing of your mind*. That takes place, of course, by the influence of the gospel.

I John 5:19 “And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.”

The world is not saved. The world is not living for Christ. There may be some commendable things about people in the world, concerning how they act toward one another and the good, charitable, and honest

deeds that they may do, but the Bible says that those outside of Christ, those who are in the world, spiritually speaking, exist in wickedness. They are separated from God.

Christians are those who are *called out* of the world and into Christ. The world is draped in the darkness of sin, but Christians are to shine like lights. That means there is as much contrast between the kind of life a Christian is to live and the kinds of lives people in the world live as there is between noonday and midnight.

I Peter 4:4 “Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:”

Christians who act, talk, dress, and think like the world are not living the kind of holy and separate lives that the Lord says we are to live. Where are the ancient landmarks? Just how far have we moved them today? Preachers and churches used to cry out against sin. Now, just about every worldly, carnal, sensual, sinful behavior that you can find in the world, you’ll not only find in the lives of many who claim to be Christians, but you’ll find churches that at the least say nothing about it, if they don’t outright try to justify it. The fact is, God demands a difference. Our lives should be pure and clean, consecrated and holy, because God has placed a boundary there. Let us not remove the ancient landmarks that God has set.

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