

Moving the Landmarks of Our Forefathers

Proverbs 22:28; Jeremiah 6:16

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Boundaries are given to us by God so that we stay where we ought to stay and do not into forbidden territory. We can see the benefit of having property boundaries and landmarks so that we know where our property ends and where our neighbor's property begins. In fact, you could be subject to civil sanction if you disregarded those property boundaries and built your home so that it overlapped onto your neighbor's property.

It is paradoxical how individuals, families, and nations recognize this principle and yet how often when the subject shifts to moral issues and God's commandments they do not want to hear about God's boundaries. To the contrary, they want to talk about freedom by which they mean to be free of God's moral boundaries found in His Law. This is one of the purposes of God's commandments—to set moral boundaries for all men, women, and children in thought, word, and deed.

I would submit that the temptation to move the doctrinal boundaries established in Scripture and applied by our covenanting forefathers is much greater when we are not hedged in by the lawful spiritual authority of the eldership. When are children in the home more likely to cross over the boundaries established by God and applied by parents? They are more likely when the parents are out of the room or out of the house. And so likewise, we are all more likely to move the moral and doctrinal landmarks of our God and of our covenanting forefathers if the session of this church should be dissolved. For that reason, dear ones, we need to realize the grave and serious sin involved in moving the moral boundaries that we have hitherto professed and practiced as a covenanted church. We need to renew our commitment and covenant with the Lord that we will be faithful to those covenanted boundaries whether there is a functioning church court or whether there is no functioning church court. For there is a Lord to whom we have covenanted by way of our church membership and by way of our Solemn League and Covenant to uphold and defend the moral truths taught in Holy Scripture and embraced and practiced by our covenanting forefathers. This Lord's Day, let us consider together the landmarks or boundaries which God has set in our lives and the sin involved in crossing over or moving those boundaries. There are two questions raised within our text that we must answer: (1) What Is the Sin of Moving the Ancient Landmark? (2) What Is the Landmark of Our Fathers?

I. What Is the Sin of Moving the Ancient Landmark?

A. Solomon literally commands us, "Stop moving the ancient boundary."

1. For the Hebrew form of this prohibition actually assumes that the sin of moving the ancient landmark is presently happening, and it must be stopped. It cannot continue. Rather than giving the form of a universal prohibition, "Thou shalt not move the ancient boundary," Solomon is a witness to the gross sin within the church of his time in this very area and commands them at that time (and us at this time) to stop it immediately.

2. What were these landmarks that were being moved? The ordinary sense in which these landmarks would be understood in the days of Solomon would be that of common markers of some kind which divided one person's property from another person's property.

3. When we read in Proverbs 22:28, "Remove not the ancient landmark", we ought not to conclude that what is forbidden in this verse is taking the landmark out of the field altogether and hiding it or destroying it. Solomon is not saying, "Stop picking up those good old landmarks and carrying them off to where they will never be found again." Certainly that would be sinful without question. However, Solomon

says in effect, "Stop shoving or pushing the good old landmark a little bit at a time so that no one knows where it originally stood in the first place." For to shove the ancient landmark even a foot or two is to rob one's neighbor of his property given to him by God.

a. Dear ones, listen carefully. It is not the degree to which the landmark is moved that God condemns in Proverbs 22:28, but rather that the landmark is moved at all.

b. Just as the Ninth Commandment does not merely forbid telling big lies or telling many lies, but rather telling all lies, so the Eighth Commandment does not merely forbid stealing a lot from your neighbor, it forbids stealing from your neighbor at all: "Thou shalt not steal." Period! It may be more aggravated of a sin to move the landmark a mile than a foot, but you have moved the landmark of your neighbor just the same and have robbed your neighbor of his property, even if you have pushed the landmark a foot rather than a mile (just as you have robbed your neighbor if you have taken 1 dollar instead of 100 dollars or have taken 1 hour from your employer instead of 100 hours).

4. To move these appointed markers was condemned by God as a cursed sin as we see in the following passages: Deuteronomy 19:14; Deuteronomy 27:17.

5. When we rob others of property, money, or time, let us not forget that God is the first and proper owner of all property, honor, possessions, money, and time (Psalm 24:1; Psalm 50:12). Thus, to rob your neighbor is to rob God of what He gave to your neighbor. And God will not long stay His mighty hand against those who rob Him and continue in their sin (1 Corinthians 10:22).

6. It becomes so easy to rationalize our robbing God and others when we do it in such small increments. "I'm just borrowing it for now, but I will return it later" (but later never comes because it is conveniently forgotten). Or "That store has so much; it surely won't miss the little I have shoplifted." Or, "I am so needy; surely my need justifies my stealing in this case." Or, "I'm not taking this for myself, but for someone needier than myself." Thus, the end justifies the means (i.e. if we steal and move the boundaries for the right reasons, it's justified). Again I say, it is not how far the boundary has been moved that makes one a thief, but that the boundary has moved it at all. If it is easy to push the ancient landmark a foot this time, it will be easier to push it two feet next time, and five feet the time after that until you have little or no conscience at even picking the landmark up and moving it a mile or burying it altogether.

B. Let us consider some other ways in which one may move the ancient boundaries. It is interesting that the Hebrew word translated "remove" in Proverbs 22:28 is also used as a noun in Proverbs 14:14 ("backslider"). For one who backslides from a position of truth or from a position of righteousness which he/she formerly embraced is condemned as a boundary mover.

1. Have you moved the good old boundaries in your life by falling into some sin which you continue to practice (perhaps secretly practice)? You may have everyone around you fooled, but you know you have moved the boundary of holiness in your life. Perhaps you are presently trying to justify your sin that you have only moved the boundary a little. No one else knows about it. It's not a public scandal. It may be lust or pornography. It may be lying or cheating. It may be shoplifting. It may be prayerlessness. It may be a lukewarmness and apathy for the things of God due to the pleasures of this life or coveting the things of this life, or due to the music to which you listen, or the movies or sitcoms which you watch. It may be a stubbornness or hardness of heart against the pricking of your conscience by the Holy Spirit of God. For we who are sinners (by nature) do not like boundaries. Due to the corruption of our own hearts we (by nature) resent them and hate them because these moral boundaries tell us that we are finite and limited creatures, and we want to be gods determining our own boundaries. In our sinful heart we say, "Boundaries spoil our fun. Boundaries do not allow us to express ourselves as we would like. Boundaries limit our freedom. I hate boundaries." However, when the sinner comes to God confessing his sin of hating God's holy boundaries and trusting alone in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for his righteousness (who never moved one of God's moral landmarks) and trusting alone in Christ alone for his forgiveness (who has borne the guilt and curse for all of

the times in which you have moved God's moral landmarks, God (through His unbounded grace) removes the hatred you have for His holy boundaries and replaces it with a love for His holy boundaries. And although the Christian will trespass across the moral boundaries God has established in His commandments, he no longer blames the holy boundaries which God has established, but blames himself as the culprit. For he is brought to shame as he realizes he has sinned against not only the holiness of God (in trespassing these holy boundaries), but has also sinned against the wisdom of God and the love of God (who gives them for his good and not for his destruction according to Deuteronomy 6:24).

2. Have you moved the boundaries of truth in your life?

a. Have you become a backslidden boundary mover in compromising the truth in uncomfortable situations? You don't want to stand out as a Christian (to be mocked or to be disliked) so it is just easier to blend in with family, friends, or co-workers when the truth of Jesus Christ is under attack (for example, when the topic of holy days is being discussed, especially at this time of the year when not only worldlings but also nearly all churches are caught up in the celebration of Christmas, which Christ Himself nor His apostles or prophets ever appointed, and which brings Protestants ever closer to Rome in the celebration of the Christ-mass). I am not talking about being wise or timely in the way you stand for the truth (that we should do), I am talking about not taking a stand for Christ at all because it is embarrassing or uncomfortable. Are you so concerned about your own embarrassment before others when the sinless Son of God willingly suffered the shame as a cursed criminal for elect sinners, sinners who deserved everlasting condemnation of the Son of God in hell?

b. Many of those who have been excommunicated from the church have backslidden from truths which they previously professed and embraced.

(1) It is, indeed, grievous to hear that the ancient landmark of our fathers is being moved by some who no longer profess the descending obligation of the Solemn League and Covenant to us who dwell in the United States, Canada, and any other dominion or former dominion of Great Britain. I intend to spend time on this subject when we get to chapter 3 of Galatians. Just as all of the succeeding posterity of Israel as a moral person were bound by the covenant at Sinai, so are we the same moral person with our fathers who swore the Solemn League and Covenant in England, Ireland, and Scotland (Deuteronomy 29:15). Just as the covenant made at Sinai continued to bind all Israelites even after the ten tribes of Israel declared their independence from the two tribes of Judah, so are we yet bound even though we in the United States have declared our independence from Great Britain. Just as the moral person and posterity of the Israelites were bound to keep the covenant made at Sinai with God even when they were not in the land and did not have their own functioning king or priesthood, so are we who are the familial, ecclesiastical, and national posterity of those who covenanted with God in the Solemn League and Covenant. Dear ones, covenants between men are binding and it is sin to break such covenants, how much more to backslide or to deny a covenant made with the everlasting and omnipresent Lord of the whole world by our faithful covenanting forefathers? Note carefully the seriousness of the sin of covenant-breaking (especially with God) and the list of sins with which it is associated (Romans 1:31; 2 Timothy 3:3).

(2) Furthermore, some have moved the boundaries of truth in denying that Presbyterianism is alone of divine right and now do not look upon denominationalism as an evil schism within the Church of Christ. To the contrary, it is proposed that we can tolerate or accommodate such sinful divisions within the Visible Church of Jesus Christ. This is completely contrary to the express teaching of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20), of the apostles (1 Corinthians 1:10), and contrary to our Solemn League and Covenant, which states that all such sinful divisions are to be uprooted rather than tolerated. To the contrary, the apostles did not form distinct but yet approved denominations when doctrinal differences and practices occurred, but rather they instructed us to withdraw from those promoting such sinful and schismatic divisions within the Church (Romans 16:17). And if you are to withdraw from one who does so, how much more are you to withdraw from many who do so—even if they call themselves a church. Even the Sixth Commandment

would require us to care enough for our own spiritual welfare and the spiritual welfare of our children that you not unite yourself with or sit under the ministry of those who have departed from the biblical landmarks and attainments of your spiritual forefathers.

(3) “But the various denominations use the Scripture to defend their positions—they are not unbiblical.” Dear ones, every sect and denomination will seek to use the Bible to justify their separate and distinct existence even when it is for an unbiblical reason. Even the devil looked to the Scriptures to support his moving the boundaries of truth when he tempted Christ to leap from the pinnacle of the temple (Matthew 4:6, “for it is written”). We can certainly deceive ourselves with emotions and words of so-called “freedom” in how good it is to be set free from those “legalistic” boundaries. The Apostle Paul has warned us that the time will come when members of the church will not endure sound doctrine (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Let us, therefore, ever pray in all humility that God will grant His grace to live within the boundaries of truth which He has revealed in the Scriptures and not backslide from them (Jeremiah 6:16). For our intellectual pride will deceive and mislead us into pushing back the boundaries of truth (of course “in the interests of truth and unity”). For no professing Christian is likely to say, “I’m moving the boundaries because I want to deny the truth and embrace error.” Watch, therefore, with all vigilance and diligence for the words of the enemy come to you as they did to Even, “Yea, hath God said. . . .” Test the teachers and the impressions in your own soul by the infallible Scriptures. Let not the desire for new light blind you to the true light of Scripture. The Lord God is jealous for His doctrine, worship, and government. Provoke Him not to wrath because you play so loose with that which essential to the character of God: truth. It is God who has established these moral truths for us to embrace, profess, and practice whether there is a functioning and faithful church court or not.

II. What Is the Landmark of Our Fathers?

A. The removal of the ancient landmark (according to our text in Proverbs 22:28) is rendered a double transgression.

1. First, it is a transgression against my neighbor who is alive right now, for I have moved the landmark to his hurt. I have robbed him by taking his property, his honor, his good name, the time I owe him, or the mercy I owe. Or I have robbed him by taking from him the truth in doctrine and life by embracing and teaching him my error. Whenever we move those divinely appointed boundaries in our life, we necessarily rob others who are presently living.

2. Second, it is a transgression against my neighbor who is no longer living, but is dead. For observe that Solomon says in Proverbs 22:28: “Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.” Dear ones, did you know that you could sin against those who have preceded you in death? How is that possible?

a. You sin against the dead by sinning against your “fathers” who taught clearly the truth as revealed in Scripture for you to follow. Your “fathers” in the faith have blazed a path through the theological jungle and have lived and suffered such persecution for standing for the truth, and many were martyred for the truth of Jesus Christ, sounding forth as a testimony to not only those who heard them, but as a testimony for you who followed them. Donald Cargill and James Renwick died as Covenanters for the divine right of Presbyterianism, and for the descending obligation of our Solemn League and Covenant. We sin corporately against our “fathers” when we renounce the biblical truths for which the faithful Church of Scotland stood. For the faithful Church of Scotland stood for the national unity of Christ’s Church (not denominationalism, not sectarianism). Dear ones, we treat the blood they shed for Christ and His truth as common or even shameful when we backslide from the “attainments” in reformation to which they ascended in church and state.

b. We are not papists in following our “fathers” implicitly by way of oral tradition;

but as our Fifth Term of Communion correctly states, “An approbation of the faithful contendings” of those witnesses and martyrs of Jesus Christ. This is not an implicit faith in the authority of our “fathers”, but rather an implicit faith in the authority of the Holy Scriptures and to the doctrine, worship, and church government that conforms to that alone infallible standard of truth.

c. Dear ones, God calls you today to cling to that which was faithfully passed down to you by your “fathers.” You are not to let their testimony for the truth be trampled under the feet of a world or even of a church that thrives on moving the ancient boundaries of truth (Revelation 2:24; 3:3). Dear ones, we multiply our sins when we ignore or neglect the faithful contendings of our forefathers rather than walking in their footsteps.

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