

Remove Not the Ancient Landmarks

Ostis B. Wilson

In Deuteronomy 19:14 we read, “Thou shalt not remove thy neighbor’s landmark, which they of old time have set...” Again in Deut. 27:17 we read, “Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour’s landmark.” We read again in Job 24:2, “Some remove the landmarks; they violently take away flocks, and feed thereof.” Proverbs 22:28 says, “Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.” Proverbs 23:10 says again, “Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless.” Verse 11 continues, “For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.”

In all these scriptures we see that the original landmarks which were set in the time of laying out and allotting the land to the children of Israel when they received their inheritance was very important all the way through in maintaining proper identification of each person’s land as the inheritance passed down from one generation to another. None were to remove the landmarks which they of old time had set (Deut. 19:14). The ancient landmarks which had been set by their fathers were not to be removed (Prov. 22:28). A curse was pronounced upon anyone who tampered with any of the original landmarks (Deut. 27:17). The rightful inheritance of each one of the children of Israel could only be identified by reference to those ancient landmarks.

It is the same in maintaining proper land lines and boundaries now. When a surveyor runs a land line he must locate corner stones and run the lines according to them. I have known them to dig up a considerable area in an effort to locate a corner stone, and if it could not be located they could not proceed with the survey until one was established. Neither was this done by arbitrary means. The surveyor did not just look around and decide on an arbitrary location as being the most likely or pretty close and run from there. Rather he went to where he could clearly locate a corner stone in each direction from the corner to be established and measured in from those stones and established a corner that

tied in with the other established corners in the area. Sometimes they would have to go maybe as much as a mile and perhaps in some cases even farther and measure in from each direction to locate a given corner. But the survey could not proceed until that corner had been definitely established to correspond with the other established corners in the area.

Also in a survey the line must be run according to where the original corner stones are found. If there are obstacles in the way and trees and brush, etc., which hinder him from seeing through to the other corner, he does not decide that the line cannot be established in that place and just move it over to another place. Instead he will carefully measure over a certain number of feet from the corner stone at each end of the line to clear the obstacle and set up his flag at that point to shoot to and run the line through from there, but bearing in mind all the time that the line he is shooting is so many feet off from the actual line. This becomes a matter of official record. When this is done and recorded legally the adjacent land owners can just wrangle and fuss all they want to and sue each other in court over the property line, but it will be always settled by the legal record of that surveyor who made the survey and established those corners. Everything in a given area must correspond with everything around it and must be tied in with the general area.

Now let us come down to apply this thought to us and to our spiritual standards, etc. In I Cor. 10:18 we read, "Behold Israel after the flesh..." But why behold Israel after the flesh? Because Israel after the flesh is a type of Israel after the spirit—spiritual Israel or the Church of God in this New Testament age of time. Those literal landmarks referred to in the above texts which were so important to the children of Israel in their inheritance, etc., were typical of those ancient landmarks of spiritual truths and standards which have been established by our fathers for the church. In the 5th chapter of Hosea, God was pronouncing judgment against the priests and princes and people of Israel for their rebellion against Him and their idolatry, etc. and in verse 10

said, “The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound: therefore I will pour out my wrath upon them like water.”

From this we see that God considers a departure from established standards set in the scriptures and established for saints to go by as removing the ancient landmarks and His judgment is pronounced against it and His wrath poured out upon those who do such things. In Rev. 22: 18, 19 we read, “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that 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 out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” We see here that it is no light thing to tamper with God’s Word and the standards and principles it sets forth to change them or remove them in any way.

Now returning to the thought that in a literal land line survey all must be definitely established to correspond with everything around it and must be tied in with the general area, this is also true in the over-all picture of spiritual things and in establishing true standards for the church to go by. Each individual part of that standard must be scripturally and spiritually established and must tie in with the general over-all standard of teaching of the church. In other words, if we see evil in a particular thing and oppose it as being not compatible with a holy life because of the evil influence of it, then we should oppose all things related to that in principle and every projection of that thing in other forms whereby its evil influence could be projected. As an illustration—if we oppose the movies in general as an element of evil influence, and I am sure that all of us do and the saints have stood against this thing from the time it first came in—then we should also oppose its offspring, the television, which projects that same evil influence from the theater right into our parlors and brings it right home to our children. As one said, “We took the night life off the streets and brought it to our homes.”

In Isaiah 62:10-12 we read, "Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people, cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people. Behold, the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken." In the above verses 10 and 12 we see that the people of God have a responsibility in lifting up a standard for the people. It did not say for them to set up a standard but to LIFT up a standard. Verse 11 speaks of Christ who is our salvation and He is declared to be the ensign or standard given to the people in Isaiah 11:12. Thus we see that the standard is already given and set up for the people in Christ and His teachings and our job is to lift up that standard in our lives and in our teachings for the people to go by. Let us not trail that banner in the dust, nor even hold it at half mast, but let us hold it high and clear and distinct so it can be seen and rallied to by the people, especially the people of God.

I once heard a story of a military standard bearer who, in the time of battle when his company was charging up a hill against a fortified enemy position, was going ahead of his company carrying the flag. Enemy fire was very effective as the enemy was strongly entrenched and the company was being shot up badly. The officer in charge deemed the battle lost and that he should pull back his men, so he called to the standard bearer, ordering him to bring back the flag. The standard bearer called back over his shoulder as he continued to charge on into the enemy position, "I won't bring back the flag; you bring up your men!" According to the story, the beaten and battered army rallied to the standard and the result was victory.

Brethren, let this be the spirit of every one of us. There is a cry from some in our day that the standard is being held too high and we are too strict about this and that, etc., and some are seeking for a modification of some of the old teachings which our fathers stood by, lived and taught, and to which God attested His sanction by

miracles, signs and wonders and abundances of divine grace, producing great joy and victorious living among His people. But when the cry goes out to bring down or lower the standard, let the spontaneous response of every one of us be that “We won’t do it; you bring up your lives.” And if all will bring up their lives to the definitely established standard and principles of truth (rally to the standard), the result will be victory.

In Numbers 2:34 we read, “And the children of Israel did according to all that the Lord commanded Moses: so they pitched by their standards, and so they set forward.” Ah, folks, there you have it! “They pitched by their standards and SO they set forward.” If we want to set forward and make real solid progress in our individual lives and in the work of God, we must pitch by the standards which God will honor and work through. Otherwise, we are doomed to certain defeat.

In Isaiah 11:12 we read, “And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” Here we see that Christ was to set up an ensign for the nations and gather the people together to it. We are to lift up His standard also to which all who love holiness can be gathered. But take note that this standard was one to which the people would be gathered. It was something clear and distinct that the people could discern and gather to. We cannot expect to gather the people to anything if we set up arbitrary standards and diverse teachings and disagree on the standards of truth and what truth is. We must survey our entire course from the landmarks established by our fathers and from the corner stones of truth from which they ran their land lines and the course we take now must be just a projection of the same lines they surveyed out for us. God has strongly attested to these principles by mighty signs and wonders being done in the name of the Holy Child, Jesus, so I consider these definitely established landmarks and safe lines to follow.

A perfectly straight line could be projected around the world and when it returned to the point of beginning it would land on the

exact dot where it started. Then it could be projected around again and form only one single line with the line on the second round falling exactly on the line which was made on the first round. So with the lines of truth—they could be projected from the teachings of Christ and the apostles right on down through this entire Christian era and if these lines have been maintained straight they can be doubled back along the same lines clear to the point of beginning and still form one single line no wider than the original line. If the line would be any wider it would be so because of a little variation and getting just a little off center. The second line might cover up the first line until it would still show just one line but if the line is wider than it originally was it would be because we had varied a little off center.

Variance is classified in Gal. 5:20 as a work of the flesh. For us to vary in any degree from the established lines of truth laid down by Christ and the apostles and perpetuated unto us by our fathers is to give place to the flesh. Two straight lines running parallel can be projected around the world and still be the same exact distance apart as at the beginning. But if there is a little variation in one of them, be it ever so slight, by the time it is projected around the world it will be off a long, long way. So with the lines of truth. If there is just a slight variation some way, by the time it is projected through this age, or through a few generations even, there is no way of calculating how far it might be off.

One has said, “Individuals are but atoms. They are born, they live, they act, they die. But truth is an eternal principle and can never be changed.” This is very true. Change truth to any degree at all and it becomes false. There may be different conditions and different things to meet in our day than in the days of Christ and the apostles or in the early days of this reformation and, no doubt, there are. But the clear principles of eternal truth, if solidly held, will meet the problems of our day the same as theirs.

But we cannot move established landmarks to suit our land lines. We must move our land lines to suit the established landmarks. At this point, I think of Bro. George Winn of Guthrie, Oklahoma,

whom some of you may still remember. He said at one time that if God would hand him the Bible and say, "Here, George, just take this book and fix it to fit you," he would just hand the Bible back to God and say, "God, the book is all right just like it is. Just fix George to fit the book." Brethren, that is the attitude we all need and must have. Let us not be trying to change any part of God's Word to suit our way of life at any point, but let us earnestly be seeking God to change our lives in any way they need changing to conform to the truths of God's Word.

In Zechariah 14:20 it says, "In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD..." This is the standard we are to lift up for the people. This is the law of God's house. Ezekiel 43:12 says, "This is the law of the house: Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house."

The first Methodist discipline had in it a paragraph which forbade the reading of such literature or the exercise of any diversions which were not conducive to spirituality and holiness. This may still be in the Methodist discipline. I do not know. But we all know that this principle has long since passed out of the lives of many of the communicants of that faith, and most faiths so far as that is concerned. The departure from this principle was the moving of a clear definite landmark which had formerly set certain bounds and established a certain course for the people to go by. So long as they remained within those set bounds and followed that certain course in their lives God's glory was manifest among them and His power worked mightily in their midst. But the removal of this landmark broke down the boundary and set the people adrift and threw them into confusion as to what the standard of Christian living was and today almost anything of the world is acceptable and very little divine power and glory is manifest in the lives of many. But let us realize that the New Testament can become a dead letter to many of us also if we do not watch ourselves very closely and stay real close to its teachings in our manner of life in every phase.

The general over-all rule for Christian living and which would also be the standard for the church to go by collectively and individually is found in 1 Cor. 10:31– “Whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God.” This should be the corner stone from which we would survey everything in every area of our lives. To state this rule or principle conversely will not suffice in this case. To state it conversely would be to state it negatively–”Will this or that dishonor God?” Let us realize we are here for the express purpose to glorify God and we should hold this principle at all times in its positive form just like it is stated here. “Do all to the glory of God”– and survey everything in life from that cornerstone of truth.

Jesus Himself laid down this pattern for us to go by. In John 4:34 Jesus said, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” Again in John 5:30 Jesus said, “...I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which sent me.” In John 8:29 Jesus said again, “The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.” Jesus did always those things which pleased His Father. He is our example. In I John 3:22 we read, “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.”

Now let us consider that those who keep His commandments may be saved (howbeit, some may not be saved who are quite strict about the commandments in the main, at least) but we must seek to do those things which are the most pleasing unto God if we would enjoy His rich blessings upon our lives. This text is put in its positive form also– “Do the things which are pleasing in his sight.” Let us think of it this way and not in its negative form–”Will this displease God?” We are plagued to a great extent with negative thinking anyway. We think and talk more about the things we do not believe in than the things we do believe in. Some have come more to an attitude of thinking, “Is this or that sin?” than of thinking “Is this or that glorifying to God?” But let us realize there are some things which could not actually be located as sin which do not really please God for us in our particular case and would not be glorifying to Him.

I esteem very highly the early pioneer ministers of this evening light reformation and the standard of holiness they held both in life and teaching. I consider those standards to be right because they worked and produced results and the results they produced are the very same results the people of God yearn for and decry the lack of in our midst today. I reverence those early brethren to the extent that it is very grievous to me when I hear people criticizing them and challenging their teachings. But it is common practice among those who accept and condone the innovations of worldly things which have been coming in among us little by little over the past few years to speak lightly of the standards taught and held by the early brethren. They also downrate those who hold for those standards yet in our day and sometimes such remarks as this are heard: "I do my own thinking. I do not accept a code that has been handed down by tradition from someone way back there that I did not even know," etc. Sometimes those who stand for those old standards are accused of just subscribing to some old tradition and doing things because someone else said to do it, etc. But when we see those old standards and that old way work and produce results and better results than the codes which people want to bring in and go by now, that is the deciding factor in our thinking.

Of course, that attitude is not fair on the face of it for who of us do not do things because others do them? Those who are in the "know" regarding those things tell us that the human race produces only a very small percentage of leaders. All the others are followers. Have any of you ever been conscious of having originated any style or fashion which went on and later became popular and was generally adopted by the world? If you cannot say "Yes" to this question, then are you not just following the styles and fashions originated by others and doing those things because the world does them? If you did not originate the styles and fashions you are subscribing to, then certainly you are a follower and not a leader. Then why would you think it fair to condemn and ridicule those who choose to stand by the standards who have come down to us from our fathers?

Would any of you even imagine that if the styles were to change in the world to long skirts that you would continue to wear the short ones you now clamor for? If suddenly no woman of the world would ever curl her hair or wear a permanent, do you imagine you would still think it necessary to curl yours and contend for those things as you do now? If not, why not? Then why would you think it proper and fair to taunt those who choose to stand by the old landmarks and not move the bounds in such a way and think of them as you do?

You may ask, and I have been asked, if I believed the early brethren had all the light. I would not have to believe that for my statement to be true in regard to them. But let us realize there is a vast difference between new light as it is being advanced today and more light on what the brethren of the early days taught and the church subscribed to in that time. I believe without doubt that we of our day have more light on some points of truth than they had in their day because there have been developments in the intervening time which would throw some clearer light on some points of truth than they could have had in their day. I can accept additions of light on these points of truth on that basis but I cannot accept “new” light which contradicts the basic teachings of the early brethren on any points of truth. But I believe that the doctrines taught in the early days of this evening light reformation contained the overall coverage of the truth as taught in the New Testament though some of it was perhaps in a limited sense which developments have brought out clearer than they had it.

But let me make it clear in this respect that most of the points I could call to mind in this category would be dealing with scriptures of prophecy and having to do with the signs of the times and the fulfillment of prophecy and not with the real standards of holiness and Christian living. In regard to that, I believe I can say here that I accept the standards as taught and lived by the early brethren as being right, full and complete, and as having no need of any deductions or additions. And I feel inclined to warn all of you at this point to be careful about accepting or being carried away with any of the innovations of worldly things or variations in teaching

and practice which have been coming in among us the last few years and are coming in among us now.

If I could see more real godliness and deep holiness of life and more of the power of God accompanying these things, I could be more interested in them. But when I fail to see this, but rather the opposite—a decline in spiritual power and deep holiness of life and more worldly mindedness, etc., I feel that the best policy for the church is to flee these things and follow after godliness. Let us not remove the old landmarks nor remove the bounds which have been set for us by those who have gone before us. Let us remember that God's Word pronounces a curse on all who do this.

I do not believe anyone could successfully contradict that there was more real divine power and spiritual life and more miracle working power and healings and genuine powerful conversions and devils cast out, etc., in those early days than what we are able to witness and testify to in the church of our day. I know you don't like that. I don't either. I would like to see it different, but to be honest I must face up to the facts as I see them and I feel you should, too. Some of the very folks who are taking in with these innovations of worldly things and variations from the former teachings and practices of the earlier brethren, decry the lack of spiritual power and miracles and healings, etc., in our day and refer back to how the early brethren did it and ask why our brethren of today do not do it that way. It is the age-old idea of wanting to have the cake and eat it, too, which cannot be done. Some would like to have all that power and glory and benefits of the early church but they are not willing to follow that standard. The two can never be harmonized so we may as well stop trying; and if we are willing to throw the standards of the early brethren overboard, just throw the rest overboard, also, and quit worrying about what they had that we do not see in that same measure in the church of our day. We can never hope for the one without the other.

We hear folks sometimes talking about God restoring to us certain things which they are conscious to be lacking. This is the wrong

approach to the problem. We should be praying for God to restore us to the standard and place in our lives and experiences where these things are. These things—divine glory, spiritual power and blessings, etc., make up the faith which was once delivered to the saints. They were delivered once, were never taken away and consequently can never be given again. They were enjoyed by the church in the early morning time. Then when there was a decline from those standards of the early morning church, these things were no longer enjoyed in a general sense. Then after the long reign of the beast of Rev. 13 (Papalism) known as the “Dark Ages,” and the reign of the second beast (Protestantism) known as the “dark and cloudy day,” when the evening light reformation broke and the saints came out into the full light of the gospel and back to the standards of Christ and the apostles and the early morning church, they found these things right there where they had been left when the first apostasy came and they enjoyed them then just as the early church did. This should be sufficient to convince us that the standard of holiness and spiritual life are closely connected with the manifestations of divine glory and power among us.

In the 26th chapter of Genesis, 12-25, we have a story related concerning Isaac, the son of Abraham, which has an important connection with my thought here. Before this time Abraham had dwelt among the Philistines in the land and had digged wells of water there for his flocks and herds which were very great. Now Abraham had died and the Philistines had stopped up the wells of water which he had dug. Isaac came to dwell in that same land and he had great flocks and herds also, and he went in and dug out those same old wells which had been dug in the days of Abraham, his father, which had been stopped and filled with earth by the uncircumcised Philistines. Verse 18 says, “And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them.”

Now let us realize that the common tendency is always to slacken and let up. This must be steadfastly resisted by all of us. The natural trend is always downward and the drift is always away from God and right. We, as saints, must not give way to this tendency but must pull against the tide of the world with all the strength we have. Each generation is inclined to accept just a little lower standard than the preceding generation held. Whatever standard we hold now, the rising generation will hold just a little lower standard and so on and on with each succeeding generation unless the heart is definitely wrought upon by the Spirit of God and a deep spirituality and deep holiness of life is maintained. Those among us who are more worldly minded and consequently less spiritual will always be ready to settle for a lower standard of life and ready to stop the wells which have been dug by our fathers.

But let us take note in the above scriptures that Isaac digged again in the wells of his father and called them by the same names. Oh, how we need to dig deep in the wells of our fathers, the early brethren—those wells of deep sincerity, deep humility, deep devotion, deep spirituality, deep godliness, and deep holiness of life and deep in the well of separation from the world and worldly things. Many today are not living that consecrated, dedicated, separated life unto God which characterized the saints of the early church and those who lived in the early days of this evening light reformation. Too much self, too much flesh, too much worldliness—and the wells of our fathers become clogged and we can never expect them to be a well spring of living water springing up into everlasting life and producing in our lives the blessings, joy, happiness, and power and grace that was and is manifested in the lives of those who keep all these things cleaned out of their lives. In 1 John 2:15-17 we read, “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 pride 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.”

Here we have a clearly set land mark and definitely established corner stone from which to run all our land lines and set our bounds. Let us call things by the same names by which our fathers called them and let us not feel it extremism to do so. The early brethren taught strongly against the wearing of gold and all ornamentation. Plainness and modesty in dress and behaviour and general conduct of life characterized the lives of those early brethren and saints. The New Testament teaches this also—1 Peter 3:3 and 1 Tim. 2:9. But I have seen entirely too many gold watches, gold bands, and ornaments among us in recent years for my comfort. I see today too many short sleeves, short skirts, thin and sheer apparel, spike heels, bare limbs, etc., among us. The brethren of former years taught against all these things and many more in principle. But there is a move on foot today to remove the bounds and destroy the old landmarks. Let us watch and be sober, folks.

Lewis F. Powell, President of the American Bar Association, in an address to a convention of this association in Miami, Florida on August 9, 1965 said, “An orderly society cannot exist if every man may decide which laws he will obey.” Surely we can readily grasp the import of this and see that in a society where every man is a law unto himself there could be no order. But how about a church where each one is a law unto himself and where the standard is set to accommodate the individual consciences of the communicants? Could that be orderly any more than a society could be orderly on that basis? No. But God is calling for order in His church. His word says in 1 Cor. 14:40, “Let all things be done decently and in order.”

I readily recognize the importance of the individual’s conscience and contend that he should keep his conscience clear between him and God at all cost. His conscience may not be perfect and clear but if he is inclined to trifle with his conscience, what chance does he have? What chance would God have to deal with him? One must never reach such a point as that. But while recognizing the place of the conscience in everyone’s life and relationship with God and placing proper importance upon it and keeping it clear between the individual and God, at the same time I contend that

the individual's conscience has nothing at all to do with what we are to teach the church as its standard of holy living. I also recognize that God deals with people according to the light and knowledge they have, in part. But I also contend that the individual's light has nothing at all to do with determining what shall be taught to the people.

The individual's light is respected between him and God. So is his conscience. But neither is respected as a standard for the church to go by. If we just teach according to the people's light and knowledge, how would they ever gain more light? God wants us to lift up a standard for the people according to His Word, irrespective of the people's light or individual consciences and let them all come to it. But, of course, while they are getting to it, their standing with Him is rated according to their light, knowledge, and conscience, and we should allow for that also in extending our fellowship and confidence to them while they are coming to it.

If God told us to lift up a standard for the people, would He not expect us to do that? Certainly. Would He expect us to be governed in that standard by any individual circumstance or condition? Certainly not. He would expect us to be directed by His Word and that only in lifting up that standard. But if we were to attempt to lift up a standard according to the individual's consciences, we would have many standards. But he said "a" standard.

Let us notice the different conditions of conscience spoken of in the scriptures. Imperfect (Heb. 9:9). Purged (Heb. 9:14). Good (1 Tim. 1:5). Pure (1 Tim. 3:9). Defiled (Titus 1:15). Weak (1 Cor. 8:7). Now let us realize that whatever state and condition an individual's conscience is in it will pretty well set his course for life. A corrupt conscience would allow corrupt things in the life of the individual without remonstrating against them, while one whose conscience was pure would require strict purity in every phase of life and so on with all the different phases and conditions of the conscience. An imperfect conscience will allow an imperfect life while a perfect conscience would demand a perfect life in order to keep clear. Paul

persecuted the Church of God in a good conscience. He said in Acts 26:9 that he verily thought within himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus. We can see then that our conscience can be affected by the way we have been conditioned. Conscience is pretty much governed and regulated by what one believes to be right or wrong. It may be wrong, but if one believes it to be right, his conscience will allow him to do it. On the other hand, it may be right, but if one believes it to be wrong, his conscience would condemn him in doing it. And let us realize that there is such a thing as a “seared” conscience (1 Tim. 4:2) and when that happens the conscience becomes entirely insensitive to anything. This condition is not arrived at immediately but comes gradually through one trifling with his conscience and failing to keep it clear and tender.

I am told that there is in some heathen lands a belief that one can only appease the wrath of his god by sacrificing his firstborn child to the crocodiles in the river. These people take their children to the river and throw them in because their conscience requires that of them and would smite them severely if they withheld. But in more enlightened America our conscience would smite us to death almost if we were to do such a thing. Thus we see that one person’s conscience would smite him severely for doing the same thing that another person’s conscience would smite him severely for not doing. Thus we see that conscience does not set any kind of a general standard at all and if it did, what kind would it be?

Now let us realize that the teaching of conscience in the New Testament covers only things which are entirely neutral in principle and involve no moral principle of right or wrong at all. Paul brought it in under the heading of eating meat which was sacrificed to idols and said in his discussion of it in I Cor. 8:8 that if we eat we are no better and if we eat not we are no worse. This covers a principle that should be applied and carried through all consideration of conscience matters. It applies only to things of an entirely neutral nature which would neither make one better nor worse either way. If it goes beyond this into something which involves moral principles of right and wrong, then we are to be

governed by God's Word and not by our conscience or what we think about it.

There has been a great cry in recent years for liberty of conscience. But let us realize that this tendency generally runs into a liberal conscience and there is a vast difference between a liberal conscience and liberty of conscience. God has talked to me some in times past on the text in Gal. 5:1, "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." People today are contending for a great many liberties which Christ did not give them. He has never at any time liberated you and me from the obligations of His Word and the standard it sets forth. All He has done in that respect at the best is to just be patient and merciful and long-suffering with us and allow us time to get to the standard and get straightened out in our conscience and light, etc. But if we would not try to get to it but just contended for our own "think-so" in it, His patience, long-suffering and forbearance would run out on us and we would be cut off. The liberty Christ gave us was never liberty to follow our own conscience alone as a standard of holiness and spiritual life. Many other liberties which people contend for and do not want to be interfered with in are liberties Christ did not make them free in, also.

God has never given to you and me free license to follow any questionable thing, even slightly, but has instructed us to abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22.) The more we do this the fuller and richer and more complete our spiritual lives will be and the more God's blessings will abound in our souls. Bro. Fred Pruitt and I were together in a meeting in Minnesota some years ago and were staying in the home of a man who was pastor of the congregation where the meeting was being held. This man was accused to us by some of the members of his congregation that he drank beer. Bro. Pruitt talked to him about it and he never said if he did or did not, but his answer was that the Bible said to be temperate in all things and that would include drinking beer the same as anything else and one could not be condemned for drinking beer if he were temperate in it. But the liberties Christ

gave never extended to such things as this and He does not grant us license to indulge in any evil thing even temperately.

There seems to be a great fear with some of our people today with respect to extremism. I know there is such a thing and I fear it, too, to a certain extent. But I feel there is not much widespread danger of it within our ranks. There is much more danger of compromise among us at this time than of extremism and fanaticism as I see it. Those who are a little on the liberal side anyway seem especially fearful of fanaticism, but I certainly feel this is a trick of the devil to get their focus on this and pull them into compromise and liberalism to avoid it. It would not be so bad if people who feared extremism so much would fear compromise just as much and religiously steer away from both of them. But it is not usually this way. I am fully aware that an extreme spirit can never be satisfied. But neither can a compromise spirit; but when given way to it will demand more and more and yet more, never being satisfied.

Let us consider Ahab, the king of Israel. He compromised the standard of God in the first place when he went out and married Jezebel, a heathen woman, which God had forbidden to be done in Israel. When he had done this thing, it took him out from under the favor of God and His sheltering wing. Then he was a victim of many things, being led captive by Satan at his will. When this woman came in, she naturally wanted to worship her god, Baal, and requested Ahab to have an altar built in the land to do sacrifice to Baal. He was already cut loose and drifting and under the power of a compromise spirit, so he conceded to this, also. Next, she wanted a temple built for Baal and he granted this request. This was a great abomination in the sight of God. But this woman could never be satisfied, so next she demanded that the altars of God be destroyed out of the land and Ahab was so victimized by this spirit by then that he granted that request, also. Then she struck the final and fatal blow to the worship of the true God and demanded that the prophets of God be put to death and Ahab conceded to this, also.

Brethren, let us realize that when we cut loose from our moorings and start drifting, there is no knowing where we will drift to. The only safe place for us is to stay anchored to the old landmarks and never take the first step away from them. We are instructed in Jer. 6:16 to “Stand 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...” Here the “old paths” are called the “good way.” This is the way God views it. This is God’s Word. Let us view it in the same way and love the old paths as we are instructed to do here.

Now we know that no religious movement ever fell to the bottom all at once. The greatest apostasy of them all that led to the establishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy came by a gradual process and was 260 years in developing, even after it got a good start and the leaven of it was working actively but gradually for a long time before that.

But stop at any point in that gradual decline and apostasy from the original spirituality and glory of the early church and name any one thing that was coming in and it by itself would appear to be of too little consequence to be worthy of much attention, let alone create a controversy. This would be especially true in the first stages of the decline because such things always start on very minor points. After apostasy is farther advanced and the darkness in men’s souls increased and their conscience becomes more seared, then they can take bigger steps at one time without any conviction. But they have to be conditioned for those bigger things and the devil knows he could not impose the big things at first while there is still a lot of light in the soul and a considerable degree of spirituality and divine power and blessings manifest in the movement. He must begin with very minor points that appear so insignificant as to be absurd and work up to bigger things later on.

The apostasy in the Evening Light Reformation movement is no exception to this rule but has followed the general pattern of all before it, beginning with only minor points and working on into the bigger things later on. But perhaps the apostasy in this

movement has been the most rapid of any before it. This should cause us to stop and take notice, because this certainly indicates a general condition existing in the world and in the hearts of men which makes it easier for the people to accept these things and for the devil to push them in upon the people. No reformation before this one has ever fallen so far in such a short time. This should certainly cause us to fear to take the first step in that direction.

But, even though the first steps were small and insignificant, those first fruits of it are a part of it the same as the later fruits are a part of it. The little minor points on which it started are as much an important part of it as the bigger things that came later. Without the little things, there never could have been the bigger things. Little drops of water make the mighty ocean. Little grains of dirt make this great earth. And a conglomerate accumulation of little things make a great apostasy, the result of which is a fallen movement.

I will now notice some scriptures in God's Word directed to the ministry and I notice them here for a definite purpose. Let me put it this way. A minister's right to speak is a priceless treasure. Without it he becomes useless as a minister and overseer of the flock of God and a watchman on the wall to warn of approaching danger. The scriptures given along this line are all aimed at protecting the minister's right to speak in any and all points. Note the following scriptures on this line.

"The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits." 2 Tim. 2:6, 7.

"Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believer in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." I Tim. 4:12.

"In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing incorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed having no evil thing to say of you." Titus 2:7, 8.

“Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.” 1 Peter 5:3.

One can see at a glance that the objective of all these scriptures and others along this line which could be produced is to protect the minister’s right to speak in any matter that arises. He is commanded to be an example in all things so that he may have a right to speak in all things and to “...reprove, rebuke, and exhort” (2 Tim. 4:2), with effectiveness.

When Paul was giving instructions to the church at Thessalonica he paused to remind them: “Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe.” 1 Thess. 2:10. And as a result of that he was able to record this result from his preaching to them: “When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” 1 Thess. 2:13. His preaching and teaching was effective and fruitful among them because his behaviour among them gave him a right to speak in their own eyes.

This same writer says in 2 Cor. 10:6, “And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.” This makes it plain that we have no right to speak against the disobedience of another if we ourselves are disobedient on some point and not fulfilling all righteousness ourselves.

But let us get down to the point in all of this. It is believed by many that the rift which came about in this Evening Light Reformation movement in about 1910 to 1914 was all brought about by the necktie issue and the idea of causing a rift or split in the movement over such a little thing as a necktie is hooted at as an extremely ridiculous thing by many. If that were the truth of the matter and if that were the real issue and the only issue it would be an extremely ridiculous thing. I agree with you that it would be. But, as already observed, all spiritual declines and apostasy begins with very small things and move on to greater things as they progress. The apostasy of this Evening Light Reformation was no exception

to this rule. But let us face it squarely as the history of the developments confirm it to be. The innovation of the necktie was definitely the removing of one of the landmarks of our fathers and when one landmark is removed or destroyed it throws all related things out of proper focus.

It is evident beyond question that the necktie has served as a mouth stopper in the hands of Satan. He who wears a tie has no right to speak against a string of pearls that a woman wears around her neck. Anything and everything that could be said for or against either of these could also apply to the other in the same way. Likewise the woman who wears the string of pearl beads around her neck would have no right to speak about the person who wore some other kind of jewelry. And this person who wears the jewelry of whatever kind it is would have no right to speak about the person who wore make-up, etc. And so on and on it goes, one thing after another, while the minister is helpless to prevent it. They have forfeited their right to speak.

“Oh,” but you may say, “I know ministers who really preach it straight and cry out against those kind of things.” Yes. But is there any authority back of it? Is it effectual that they do? Do not these things continue to increase among those who profess to be the Church of God of this day and also many other lines of worldliness without letup? We all know this to be true and it is for no other cause than that the ministers in this movement who cry out against these things have forfeited their right to do so and consequently all their crying out is weak and ineffectual. The fact that these things are cried out against by some and yet increases only adds weight to my argument at this point.

I am sure there are some still alive today who can remember when this and other innovations were first introduced among the saints. Many were afraid of them at that time but were consoled by the promise of the brethren who were endorsing them that it would just be these few minor changes to give us more influence with the better class of people of the world so we can reach more of them and we will go no farther. But was that the case? History up to

now and the present conditions of worldliness of every kind flooding the professed Church of God shouts in deafening tones “NO!”

Now I would not dare to say that these brethren willfully misrepresented the facts in the case and their honest intentions. No doubt, they spoke as they felt and did not intend for things to happen as they did. They could not possibly have foreseen all that has happened anyway. They certainly did not plan all of this in their own minds and hearts. But what did happen was that when they conceded to these things they lost control and forfeited their right to speak out against other kinds of worldliness and the devil who promoted the whole thing just kept pushing in one thing after another that they had not seen or thought of before. A clearly established landmark had been removed and it threw everything related to it out of kelter and there were no fixed lands to go by in this area. Instead of the clearly defined land line of demarkation and total abstinence from all things of a worldly nature which had characterized the church and the teaching up to this point, it now became a question of what types of worldly things would be permitted. If any worldly things at all were permitted then how would other worldly things compare with them and if one accepted or practiced one thing of a worldly nature what right then did he have to condemn or criticize another who practiced some other thing of a worldly nature? And so on and on it went.

It was like the leak in the Holland dike in the story. First there was just a little seepage of water that dampened the earth. But the water had found a way through and soon it was a little trickle of water coming through, then a larger trickle growing into a stream, and then, in spite of all the efforts of all the men in the area to stop it, it broke on through the dike a mighty, gushing, uncontrollable flow of water which flooded all the low land areas, destroying many homes and many lives and much property. This story fairly represents what happened in this Evening Light Reformation movement.

I read Chas. E. Brown's book, "When The Trumpet Sounded." At one place in it he was discussing the time when the question of the tie was first introduced. It was in regard to brethren being required by their employers to wear a tie as a part of their uniform while on duty. That was granted, and Bro. Brown said, and said significantly that, "Anyone who understands human nature would know that when such a concession was made that henceforth there would be no standard on that point." That is certainly true but it is also true that when a standard on any point is destroyed that standards on relative points are affected and they in turn affect standards on other points related to them until it passes through the entire system and the result is the whole standard in general is affected and eventually destroyed. This has happened to a great extent by now in the liberal wing of the evening light reformation movement, but I prophesy that Satan is not through with it yet. It will get worse yet than what it is now. Let us not forget that neither an extreme nor compromise spirit can ever be satisfied but will demand more and more and more and yet more as it progresses.

When I was a boy I loved the game of football. I loved to play it and to watch it being played. But I learned that the man carrying the ball was not the only important man on the team. The blockers are very important men, too. Their job is to keep the opposing players out until the play is successfully executed. With good, effective blocking, the players handling the ball can successfully execute the play and make good gains. But in many cases where blocking is ineffectual the opposing players break through the defense line and break up the play in progress with the result that ground is lost instead of gained.

That is something in the light that I see these first innocent-looking, ineffectual, inconsequential, little innovations that were introduced into the Evening Light Reformation movement. They were the mouth stoppers and their acceptance made all protest against other things weak and ineffectual because the minister's right to speak had been forfeited. In other words, these things served as blockers and ran the interference for the devil against

any and all opposition while he pushed through one thing after another and scored touchdown after touchdown against the church.

But let us not make the mistake of looking way off yonder and thinking only of what has happened to other folks and to what extent they have gone. Let us realize that the same thing can happen to us if we allow it and it will happen to us if we do not keep solidly anchored to our moorings and adhere strictly to the old landmarks and follow the land lines laid out for us in ancient times by our fathers. Let us take a good close-up look at the things which are hammering at our own gates today and let us realize that if these things are accepted they will constitute a removing of the ancient land marks and an altering of the ancient land lines and the result of such a thing could only be confusion and chaos.

Now this is the light in which we view these things and we see from the experiences of others the extreme hazard of cutting loose from our moorings and beginning to drift. When one does this the ocean is large and there is no imagining where one will wind up when drifting.

I read an article in a magazine once, the title of which was, "A Fortune in a Bottle." It was about a fellow strolling along the ocean beach on one of our coasts and finding a bottle containing the will of a woman in Scotland who had willed all her fortune to the finder. She had thrown the bottle in the ocean over there in Scotland and a lawyer investigating the case charted the course the bottle would have to follow to reach where it was found and estimated it would take approximately twelve years for it to make the trip. That was in keeping with the date of the will and it furnishes a fair example of drifting. No one ever knows where a thing will go when it is cut loose to drift. Therefore, let us not think of taking the first step toward compromise.

I heard a minister in his message a while back say that when he and his wife were first married he sat down with her and asked her if she ever intended to divorce him. She was in the height of ecstasy of her new married joy, and of course the answer was "No."

He told her that he never intended to divorce her either but cautioned that they never take the first step in that direction. He exhorted that they never go to sleep at night with anything existing between them that might have come up during that day. If they kept everything cleared up as they went along and never let a misunderstanding exist overnight their marriage would certainly never end in the divorce court. He explained to her that it was not the big things which brought married couples to the divorce courts, but just an accumulation of small things and misunderstandings, etc., which summed up to a big thing. This same thing applies to what I am dealing with here and that is just the way things develop in apostatizing from the truth in just one little thing after another resulting in a great mountain.

I believe that was real good advice from this minister and his wife, for myself and you and everyone else and I believe it is good advice in this case—never take the first step toward compromise.

Now in concluding, let me earnestly exhort all brethren in Christ that we all stand fast in one mind striving for the faith of the gospel and that we all present a solid front against the enemy and stand solidly together to defend the church and the succeeding generations against the innovations of worldly things which today are hammering at our gates trying to push in upon us. Let us see to it that no bounds are removed and no landmarks are destroyed and no corner stones of truth are moved out of their places and let us all earnestly contend together for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. Let us first of all contend for this faith within ourselves that we may possess within us the fullness of this faith with all its fruits, its personal regenerating power, its sanctifying power, its gifts of the Spirit, its unifying power and influence, its personal relationship with God, its miracle working power and that we may abound in the fullness of divine love and grace in our personal lives. Let us dig deep in the wells of our fathers and God will surely bless us to be able to meet the problems of our day and overcome them and move on for God.

Editor's Note: O. B. Wilson, now deceased, was associated with the Faith and Victory group and preached this message out of a concern for them