

Stumbling Blocks

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In Matthew 18 Jesus pulled aside a child and began teaching his disciples on stumbling blocks. This leads into the next chapter as Jesus spoke about the things that make being a disciple of Jesus hard. He would declare that we must choose Him over associations (church discipline), over marriage (MDR), and over our possessions (the rich young ruler). All of these things begin in His teaching on stumbling blocks.

What is a stumbling block? We might consider them as three things:

Something I may be able to do - a Liberty (Romans 14:12-15)

Something I am not supposed to do - a Sin (James 4:17)

Something I am required to do - another's Sin (1 Corinthians 1:23)

A stumbling block of liberty – Romans 14:20-23. This is something that we are permitted to do; it is not a sin. But in practicing or doing we encourage another to violate their conscience, and for them it is a sin. To be clear, this is not about misjudging (i.e. just seeing it happen). This is by actively encouraging someone to participate in something that they feel is wrong. We may be clear in our conscience, but we are not mindful of the conscience of others.

Consider too what we learn about the nature of road hazards. First, it is those closest to the Christian who causes the stumbling block that are hurt the worst. Who suffer most? Husbands, Wives, Children, and Brethren. Second, there is the minimal knowledge of the harm caused, and that the person who causes the stumbling block is often unharmed entirely. Finally, the issue is that stumbling blocks cause massive damage to those around us. Indeed, souls are being lost because of these things.

A stumbling block of sin – Revelation 2:14-15, 20. This is a stumbling created when we are sinning in our conduct. We do not appreciate that in practicing sin we encourage others to sin. Almost all sin contains stumbling blocks (hence the importance of public confession).

A stumbling block of truth – 1 Peter 2:8. This is a different situation, because we are doing what is commanded by God, and sometimes that offends others. Jesus made it clear that this was not what He was warning us against. Often when we do what is right others are offended by Him. Still, even in this we can still try to avoid causing someone to stumble, as Paul did at Mars Hill in Acts 17:22.

What kinds of things cause people to stumble?

First, consider that we may be causing others to stumble by pride. This was what brought about the conversation in Matthew 18 – “Who is the greatest”. Self-righteous behavior is a great problem for many; they refuse to submit, serve or be served.

Second, we consider that we are told that we can cause others to stumble by possessions. This was Paul's warning in 1 Timothy 6:10 – "some have strayed". Possessions may be an instigation of envy, lust or covetousness. This is why we have a call to modesty – 1 Timothy 2:9.

Third, we may be causing others to stumble by compromise. 2 Peter 2:15-19 warns of causing others to sin by an "allure....ones who escaped". Our worldly behavior that draws in others. This is done in many ways, such as with Peter in Galatians 2:11-13.

Finally, consider that we can be causing others to stumble by speech. This is what we are warned by James in James 3:2-6 – "does not stumble in word". It might be gossip, coarse jesting, or evil speaking that causes others to fall, or it may be our words reflect our love or hate for others. Jesus rebuked Peter in Matthew 16:21-23 as a stumbling block for his words.

How can we avoid causing others to stumble? *He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.* 1 John 2:10