

Lesson 31

Causing Stumbling Blocks¹

Icebreaker:

Pass around each other's photographs of themselves when they were young children.

Introduction:

Jesus began His teaching on offenses by seating a child in front of the disciples. He told them that in order to enter the kingdom of heaven people must be **converted** and then **become** like children. By saying this Jesus was equating that **all believers** are **children**. Then Jesus took the child in His arms indicating how He lovingly accepts all believers as children and treats them accordingly. During His entire discourse on how to treat fellow believers Jesus holds the child in His arms. It is a visual reminder to the disciples of how He expects them to treat each other.

Group Discussion:

Have each person hold up his own photograph in front of him.

Look at each person in the room, seeing them as children being held in Jesus' arms.

1. What comes to your mind?
2. How then do you think Jesus wants you treat them?

Reading The Scripture:

Matthew 18:6-10 and Mark 9:42-48

Do Not Cause Another Believer to Stumble

Matthew 18:6-10 and Mark 9:42-48

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible,
authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a Journey with Jesus)

"And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! And if your hand causes you to stumble, **cut it off**; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, where **THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED**. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than having your two feet, to be cast into hell, where **THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED**. And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where **THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED**.

Cut it off. Get rid of anything that causes you to fall.

Isaiah 66:24. THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.

The Commands:

1. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off.²

¹ The Greek word for stumbling block is "skandalon" from whence comes our English word scandal. The word can also be interpreted as "occasion to fall", "offense" or "thing that offends". It denotes a snare, an entrapment or something that trips up. It is used in the Scriptures to refer to something that **entices** a person to sin, apostasy or cause displeasure to God.

2. If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off.
3. If your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out.

The Lesson:

Jesus begins His lesson on stumbling blocks with this statement. *“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea.”* When people read this passage of Scripture most think Jesus is talking about children, however upon rereading the passage it actually says **these little ones who believe**. Little ones who believe can be taken in a narrow context to mean children who follow Christ. However, the proper application is to all Christians since He just got through telling the disciples no one could enter the kingdom of heaven unless they become like children. It is from this perspective that the lesson is taught.

Jesus declared that anyone who placed a stumbling block in front of a believer would suffer dire consequences. In fact, it would be better if the man died rather than cause a believer to stumble. From Scripture³ we find a perfect example of people who caused others to stumble. The two men involved in the plot were Balaam, a prophet and Balak, king of Moab. King Balak hired Balaam to curse the children of Israel but God did not permit Balaam to do that. So for monetary gain, Balaam told King Balak how to get God to destroy His own people. The women of Moab were to **entice** the men of Israel to commit sexual immorality and then they would be able to lead them into idolatry. The same stumbling block occurs in the Church of Pergamum, one of the seven churches of the book of Revelation. *‘But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a **stumbling block** before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. (Revelation 2:14)*

Perhaps we can gain a better understanding of Jesus’ teaching when we reflect on how stumbling happens. First, a person can only stumble when he is **walking** or **running**. Secondly, people stumble because they **don’t see the obstacle**. This can occur for any of the following reasons: 1) they are blind 2) it is dark 3) they are not paying attention to where they are going or 4) they step into a hidden trap. Third, every stumble constitutes a **change in direction** of the body. Lets look at some Scriptures that apply to each point.

Walking and running:

- *For we **walk** by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)*
- *So that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not **walk** according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:4)*
- *Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us **run** with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith ... (Hebrews 12:1-2)*

They don’t see the obstacle:

- **Blind** - *But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has **blinded** his eyes. (1 John 2:11)*

² Cut it off or cast it out simply means to get rid of anything that causes you to stumble.

³ Number 22:1 –25:2

- This blindness also occurs in the Church of Laodicea, one of the seven churches of the book of Revelation.
- *Because you say, “ I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and **blind** and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. (Rev 3:17-18)*
- **It is dark** - Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks **in the night**, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” (John 11:9-10)
- **Not paying attention to where they are going** - Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “ I am the Light of the world; he who **follows Me** will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.” (John 8:12)
- **Stepped into a hidden trap** - *You were running well; **who hindered you from obeying the truth?** (Gal 5:7)*

Change in direction:

- *I am amazed that you are so quickly **deserting Him** who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; (Galatians 1:6)*
- *Let no one in any way deceive you, for it [the coming of the Lord and our gathering together to Him] will not come unless the **apostasy** comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, (2 Thessalonians 2:3)*
- *You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and **fall** from your own steadfastness, (2 Peter 3:17)*

One of the things that make Jesus’ teaching interesting is that He approaches the subject of **causing stumbling blocks** from two different perspectives: 1) what one person does to another and 2) what one does to himself. As incredible as it sounds, believers can trip themselves up and they suffer the same fate as those who set stumbling blocks for others. Jesus cautions His hearers that stumbling blocks can be created by: 1) what you do (hands) 2) where you walk (feet) and 3) what you see (eyes).

Group Discussion:

3. What are some ways that you can cause a believer to stumble?

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____

The Point Of The Lesson:

Don’t be a stumbling block to anyone.

Application:

Reflect on what things in your life are offensive to other believers. **Confess** them and **repent**.