

STUMBLING BLOCKS
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Matthew 18:5-9

1. Last week we saw that:
 - a. The Kingdom of Heaven must be entered.
 - b. Those who have been converted and become like children enter the Kingdom of Heaven.
 - c. Greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven is measured by the degree of humility one possesses and manifests.

NOTE: True humility involves surrender to the plans, purposes, and will of God.
2. Today we are going to focus on some principles that need to be understood and embraced.
3. Good parents possess certain characteristics.
 - a. They love and care for their children.
 - b. They do all they can to protect their children.
 - c. They nurture and encourage their children.
 - d. They want to be good examples to their children.
 - e. They appreciate those who enhance their children's lives, and feel strong indignation towards those who would harm or mislead their children.
4. John MacArthur wrote, "God is the perfect model of this kind of parental concern, because He has always been deeply concerned about the way His children are treated. It is of utmost importance to Him that they be protected and nurtured. He therefore promises blessing to those who treat His children well and gives dire warning to those who cause them harm."
5. What God told Abraham is true of all of Abraham's spiritual descendants. Genesis 12:3
"I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses (reviles) you I will curse."

I. The identification principle.

- A. Once a person becomes a child of God they are forever, intimately identified with Christ.

NOTE: We must view every true believer as a precious child of God; even those who are immature and disobedient. 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.
 - B. Those who receive (embrace, welcome, help) a child of God are receiving Christ according to verse five.
 - C. When the Risen Lord confronted Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus He asked, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Acts 9:4
 - D. In response Saul (Paul) asked, "Who are You, Lord?" and Jesus responded, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Acts 9:5
- NOTE: What is done to, or not done for, a follower of Jesus Christ is viewed as an act against Him.
- E. As children of God we are so identified with Christ that even our sin reflects on Him.

15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! 16 Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." 17 But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. 18 Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is

outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:15-20

- F. When we fail to live up to our covenant responsibilities as Christians we are failing Christ.
1. How we are treated, and how we treat others reflects on, and impacts Christ, because we are one with Him.
 2. We show respect and love for Christ when we show respect and love for those who belong to Him.

II. The peril principle.

- A. In verse six Jesus stated that a person would be better off dead than to have to answer to God for causing one of His children to stumble (cause to fall).”
- B. Part of the reason this world will experience the wrath of God is because of its stumbling blocks.
- C. Jesus pointed out that stumbling blocks are inevitable, but woe to the person who is responsible for being a stumbling block or placing a stumbling block in another person’s way.
- D. Sometimes we are stumbling blocks without meaning to be. Matthew 16:21-23
From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. 22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." 23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! **You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.**"
- E. We are all impacted to some degree by the allurements of this world.
- F. We must also remember, that not only are we as God’s children susceptible to being tripped up, but we can also cause others to stumble.
- G. The world is the world, but it is sad when we as Christians are unwittingly in league with the world and the Devil.
- H. There are severe consequences for those who cause others to stumble; the wrath of God for unbelievers and the discipline of God for believers.

III. The prevention principle.

- A. Jesus use hyperbole to stress that whatever causes us or others to stumble must be decisively dealt with.
- NOTE: We use the members of our body to commit sin, but they are not the reason why we sin.
- B. Some examples would be.
1. A besetting sin like the tendency to gossip or to speak without thinking or without regard for how our words affect others.
 2. A situation that puts the pressure on us to compromise our convictions or to compromise the convictions of others.
 3. A habit or personal preference.
- NOTE: A pastor friend of mine had his life changed when a young man he was counseling said, “Pastor, I could have more confidence in what you are telling me if you did not smoke.” My friend told me, “It was like I was stabbed in the chest when I realized that my ministry had been compromised with some people because of my smoking.” From that moment he never smoked another cigarette.
4. Any behavior that sets a wrong example.

5. A friendship or relationship with someone who is not a good influence on us.
- C. If there is something in our life that causes us to stumble we should decisively deal with it, and if there is something in our life that might cause others to stumble decisively deal with it.

APPLICATION

1. The bottom line is that God loves and watches over His children, and those who negatively impact them will answer to Him.
2. I am grateful that my sin, past, present and future, has been atoned for, but that fact does not mean that I can live as if my personal behavior no longer matters.
3. As a follower of Jesus Christ my utmost desire should be to represent Him well in this world, and to be His instrument in the lives of others.
4. A failure to do so will have consequences for me and for others.