

Personal Offenses – How To Deal With Them

Introduction...

- I. Read Text – **Matt. 18:7-35**
- II. Jesus said, **“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!” (v. 7).**
 - A. With these words, Jesus introduces a discourse in which He...
 1. Warns against offending a weak brother.
 2. Instructs us as to what our attitude ought to be toward those who fall.
 3. Tells us how to deal with a brother who sins against us.
 4. And the attitude of forgiveness that we need to possess when a brother repents.
 - B. On the surface, Jesus words seem so easy to understand and simple to follow. But the truth is that they...
 1. Have been misunderstood and misinterpretations of the text have resulted.
 2. And, practically, they are often difficult to follow for many reasons.
- III. In this study I want to analyze this passage with you. I beg for your careful consideration of the things I have to say.

Discussion...

I. Warning against casting “stumbling blocks”... Matt. 18:7-11

Matt 18:7-11

7 "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!

8 "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire.

9 "If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

10 "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.

11 ["For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.]

- A. A **“stumbling block”** is **“1. a device for catching something alive; a trap; 2. an action or circumstance that leads one to act contrary to a proper course of action or set of beliefs; temptation to sin; enticement”** (BDAG)
 1. The literal idea in the term is of someone who would deceptively place in your path a stick, rock, rope, or any object by which they would cause you to trip. (Picture an old western movie where the outlaw stretches a rope across the path of an unsuspecting victim).

2. Spiritually, we're talking about *causing someone to sin by something we say or do*.
 - a. It can be done by committing sin against another, thereby tempting them to respond in some sinful way.
 - b. Or, it can be done by intentionally saying or doing something that you know will cause someone to come to the wrong conclusion and thus they will say or do something sinful.
 - c. But a stumbling block can also be less explicit and less devious looking, more innocent than that – a stumbling block may be any word or deed by which another can be led to sin.

B. Jesus is not talking about offending someone by bad etiquette here. He is not talking about merely hurting someone's feelings or the fact that you may have done something that they didn't like. **He is talking about acting in such a way as to cause another to sin!**

C. In order to see the seriousness of this note Jesus' emotional word picture...

Matt 18:8-9

8 "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire.

9 "If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

D. Consider Paul's statement, made in a context of eating meat sacrificed to idols..

1 Cor. 8:13

"Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble."

E. Jesus concludes this section by commanding...

Matt 18:10

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones" i.e., see that you respect the weak, strengthen them in God's Word.

Matt 18:11

11 ["For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.], i.e., saving the lost was Jesus mission on earth – so, casting a stumbling block is serious business in that it is acting contrary to Jesus' purpose.

II. **Our attitude toward those who do stumble...**

Matt 18:12-14

12 "What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying?

13 "If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray.

14 "So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

- A. The picture here is that of a good shepherd who knows his sheep and his sheep know him...

John 10:3-5

3 "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

4 "When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

5 "A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."

- B. He loves his sheep. His duty is to *feed* and *protect* them AND *seek those who are lost*...

Ezek 34:11-14

11 For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.

12 "As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day.

13 "I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land.

14 "I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.

- C. Our attitude toward our brethren who stumble can be no less than this. Paul emphasizes this in...

Gal 6:1-2

1 Brethren, **even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one** in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

2 **Bear one another's burdens**, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

III. **How do you restore those who stumble...**

Matt 18:15-18

15 "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

16 "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.

17 "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

18 "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

- A. **Two important things** need to be noted before we begin a study of 18:15-18

1. **First, we are talking about a process of restoration.** Which means that the weak brother has sinned, he is in a lost condition, and needs by the truth to be brought back to God!

2. **Second, this is God's plan for dealing with private offenses.** The Bible plan for dealing with public offenses committed sometimes by brethren who ought to know better, though the very same outcome may be reached, is far more abbreviated...
 - a. **1 Cor 5:1-13** — The sin was known by all. The sinner had not repented. Paul's instruction was to publicly "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved..." (v. 5).
 - b. **Gal 2:11-14** — Peter's actions were not private actions and the effects of his actions went far beyond the scope of his relationship with Paul. Sometimes, to treat a public action like a private offense is the *wrong* thing to do – souls could be lost!

[But, with all of that said we ask — What is God's instructions for dealing with private stumbling blocks?]

B. **"Go and show him his fault in private" – 18:15**

1. Remember the aim is to restore him. The word *won* is used here and in 1 Pet 3:1. No attempt should be made to humiliate or crush the offender.

1 Pet 3:1

1 In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,

2. The idea here is that the sinner must first be confronted by the person (or people, as the case may be) that he has sinned against. The sin, in its first stages, should and must be, if God's word is to be followed, kept between the parties involved.
3. You must go and *talk to the sinner* – not to others and talk about him!
4. You go – don't wait for him to come to you. (Although, the offender bears a responsibility in this matter as well – Mt 5:23-24).

Matt 5:23-24

23 "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

5. *This command is most often difficult to obey!*
 - a. Both fear and pride keeps many from doing this...
 - (1) Fear – in that we are sometimes afraid of how the offender will respond and subsequent consequences (will confrontation make matters worse – this may reflect a lack of faith).
 - (2) Pride – in that we think the offender ought to come and apologize to us, rather than force us to confront him.
 - b. Both fear and pride are powerful forces that immobilize us and keep us from doing what God wants us to do.

6. The reason for this private confrontation is obvious.

- a. First, if he repents, you've won your brother. His sins are forgiven.
- b. Further, if he repents, the story of sin ends there. No one else is effected. No reputations are tarnished.

[But, what if he doesn't repent? What then?]

C. **"Take one or two more with you" – 18:16**

1. Principle is from the O.T. – Dt 19:15-21 (Note carefully the process by which a malicious witness was exposed. Circumstantial evidence?)

Deut 19:15-21

15 "A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.

16 "If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing,

17 then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days.

18 "The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely,

19 then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.

20 "The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you.

21 "Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

2. Jesus was using this passage to illustrate that – **"every fact may be confirmed"**
3. Consider carefully Jesus' use of this illustration and what the witnesses were witness to–
 - a. The witnesses of Matt. 18:16 are not witnesses to the sin committed of one brother against another. They are witnesses to the reconciliation attempt.
 - b. Thus, the actions of the witnesses in their attempt to restore the erring brother, and the action of the church later for both restoration and/or withdrawal, is based upon circumstances, and not eye witness testimony to the sin itself.
 - c. *The idea that there must be eye witnesses to sin before the church can discipline an ungodly member is not taught in the Bible.*
4. Another question arises at this point: *How much time passes between the witnesses hearing the testimony and forming their judgments, and when they inform the church?*
 - a. The answer: I don't know. The Bible doesn't say. It is a matter of expediency and judgment.
 - b. What the text demands is that the witnesses identify the sin and seek the repentance of the sinner.
 - c. Whether that process takes place in a matter of minutes, weeks, or months is totally a matter of how long it takes to get the job done!
 - d. Further, any time human judgment is exercised, room must be made for both *good* and *bad* judgment.

[So the witnesses have determined by the testimony presented by the two men that the sinner is indeed guilty and they seek his repentance. However, he still doesn't repent? What then?]

D. **"Tell it to the church" – 18:17**

1. The word *church* is a collective noun. Once the sinner has refused to hear the witnesses and repent, it is the responsibility of this body, this group, to take action.
2. How does a collective body of people function as a unit? There are two ways –
 - a. The body may function as a unit when every single member of the body acts in cooperation with one another to do something God wants us to do as a unit.
 - b. The body may also function as a unit by acting through its appointed representatives
 - (1) Illustrate: Most local churches borrow the money from a bank to build their building. However, not every single member signed the note, but the church's appointed representatives).
3. How does this practically apply in Matthew 18:17
 - a. First, **both the offended party (or parties) and the witnesses inform** the elders or the brethren in general (if no elders are present) of what has taken place.

[Assuming that elders are present and, if they are, they have the responsibility to oversee these matters. They have been appointed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and by the collective will of the congregation to oversee in this and all other matters. Theirs is the responsibility for the final decisions made on matters of judgment, whether they be good or bad, in such cases].
 - b. Secondly, the elders (or brethren in general) **inform the whole church concerning the sin and previously unsuccessful attempts for reconciliation and the collective body makes an attempt at reconciliation**, again, either –
 - (1) By every single member acting in cooperation as a unit, and/or
 - (2) By the body acting through its appointed representatives.
4. The same two issues that we considered before need to be mentioned here.
 - a. First, the actions of the church is based upon the testimony of the witnesses, not on eye witness testimony to the sin itself. *Again, the idea that there must be eye witnesses to sin before the church can discipline an ungodly member is not taught in the Bible.*
 - b. Secondly, how much time passes between the church being informed and the elders decision to lead the church in withdrawing from the sinner?
 - (1) The answer: I don't know. The Bible doesn't say. It is a matter of judgment.
 - (2) What the text demands is that the sin be identified and the repentance of the sinner be sought.
 - (3) Whether that process takes place in a matter of minutes, weeks, or months is a matter of expediency and judgment.

- (4) Further, any time human judgment is exercised, room must be made for both *good* and *bad* judgment on the part of those who are charged with making the decisions (the elders).

[Now, the church has been informed. And, at a very minimum, the elders and/or possibly others have made their attempts to reconcile the sinful brother. Yet, he still doesn't repent? What then?]

E. **"If he refuses... let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" – 18:17**

1. Jesus' Jewish listeners understood immediately the action that he was demanding. Gentiles and tax collectors were considered outsiders and avoided whenever and wherever possible.
2. The purpose for Jesus' call to isolate the sinner from the fellowship of believers is two fold.
 - a. **First, to bring him by that isolation to repentance...**

1 Cor 5:5

5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

- (1) The withdrawing of fellowship is not a "death penalty," rather, the last option to encourage repentance.

2 Thess 3:15

15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

- b. **Second, it is to remove evil influence from the body of believers.**

1 Cor. 5:6-7

⁶ "...Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? ⁷ Clean out the old leaven..."

3. Other passages are likewise very clear on how a person who has been withdrawn from should be treated. *How* to treat a brother who has been withdrawn from is not a matter of personal opinion but of divine revelation –

1 Cor. 5:9

"I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people"

Rom 16:17

"Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them."

2 Thess. 3:6

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us."

[Jesus doesn't leave the issue there in our text. One more thing needs to be addressed:]

IV. **Attitude of forgiveness... 18:21-35**

Matt 18:21-22

21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

22 Jesus said* to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

- A. Unlimited forgiveness is available to everyone who seeks it...
 - 1. Peter thought 7 times
 - 2. The Lord said, "No, not seven times, but up to 70 x 7." The point is not that one has to literally forgive a person 490 times. Rather, that we should forgive a brother as often as he genuinely repents. There are no limits.
- B. Jesus taught a parable about two servants to illustrate point:
 - 1. The first servant was in debt over 10 million dollars! He begged for mercy and was forgiven.
 - 2. That same servant then went and found another who owed him 20 dollars and grabbed him by the throat and said, "pay up!" When that indebted servant was unable to pay, the forgiven was unforgiving and cast the insignificant debtor into prison.
 - 3. The Lord of both these servants then took this unbelievably uncompassionate, unforgiving, and wretched servant and threw him in jail.
 - 4. And Jesus said, **"My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."**
 - 5. We must have a forgiving spirit.

Conclusion...

- I. Let us be careful not to cause stumbling!
- II. Let us come to an understanding of the Bible procedure in restoring one who has sinned against us and follow it! (And be patient with bad judgments that are made along the way and remember that they are just that – bad judgments).
- III. Let's be willing, when a sinner truly repents, to forgive because God forgives us such a great debt.