"Don’t be a Stumbling Block"

I Corinthians 8:1-13

7-16-2023

INTRODUCTION: (Verse 1a)

***Take heed that no one stumbles into sin because of you** (v. 9).

I. Pay more attention to <u>LOVE</u> than to your knowledge (v. 1-8)

II. Pay more attention to <u>RESPONSIBILITY</u> than to your rights (v. 9-12)

III. Pay more attention to <u>OTHERS</u> than to your self (v. 13)

CONCLUSION:

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V. 1

With the questions regarding marriage and singleness answered, Paul now answers a second question.

"Now as touching..." - The Apostle Paul now speaks to a question evidently asked by a large segment of the Corinthian church regarding eating meat sacrificed to idols.

[These believers--strongly convinced of their doctrinal position and basking in their Christian liberty--had expected Paul to come to their side in defending their right (*"liberty"* - v. 9) to indulge freely in practices which in and of themselves were non-moral issues.]

Another segment of the Corinthian church felt strongly that a Christian should never eat meat that had been offered to idols.

Many of the Corinthians were saved out of idolatry (I Cor. 6:9), so they felt more strongly about anything that reminded them of their pagan, idolatrous past.

"Things offered unto idols" - "Various types of choice animals without blemish were offered to the gods. Part of the meat was burned on the altar and part of it was used for a sacred banquet with the deity as the honored guest,a nd that which was left was sold at the market place (Bruce, cited by Reinecker, p. 411).

This meat would have been the highest quality meat since it was used in sacrifice by pagan priests, and it would have been the most inexpensive meat since it would have been originally donated freely to the pagan temple.

(Can you image being an economically-minded Christian and getting a great deal on top-quality steaks?)

V. 13

"Offend" - Not speaking of something you dislike (EX: "That black shirt you are wearing offends me." If by that you mean that you don't like it, then "Tough luck, buddy, I'm going to wear it anyway." But if you mean, "You don't realize it, but I was once in the church of Satan and every time the priest would perform a sacrifice, he would wear a shirt like that, and yours reminds me of my old life in Satanism" --- Then I would burn that shirt and never wear it again! (ILLUS. by Jim Binney).

"Offend" - Not speaking about hurt feelings but doing something which will lead a person to stumble or trip into sin.

V. 9

"Take heed" - This is the only imperative in this chapter! God is saying something of importance; Note this, pay attention, look out!

"Stumbling block" - A hindrance; an obstacle; something which gets in the way of a person and thus either stops his progress or trips him up.

Romans 14:13 - *"Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."*

***Take heed that no one stumbles into sin because of you** (v. 9).

I. Pay more attention to <u>LOVE</u> than to your knowledge (v. 1-8)

V. 1

"We all have knowledge" - The Corinthian church certainly did <u>not</u> lack in knowledge (I Cor. 1:5) [at least on many issues] -- but they did lack in <u>love</u>.

"Knowledge <u>puffeth up</u>, but charity (love which gives) ***<u>edifieth</u>" -*** What a powerful statement! One blows up the head, the other builds up a life.

Head knowledge of facts (truths) can make one proud, but having a heart concern for others will build them up in the faith.

Biblical knowledge may make a man look big, but only Biblical love (coupled with that knowledge) can bring you and others to full maturity.

Many have their doctrinal *i's* dotted and their theological *t's* crossed, but lack the most important virtue of love.

Paul is not down on theological or doctrinal knowledge (in fact, he praises it - v. 4-8); what he is down on is knowledge without concern for others (specifically, others who are weaker).

Mere knowledge of right and wrong does not make you a spiritual Christian (ignorance does not either). If you are content with your knowledge of God's Word, but are not loving God and His children, you know NOTHING yet.

V. 2

"Ignorance" - Does not know that it does not know

"Pride" - Thinks it knows all when it does not know it

"Humility" - Does not know all and knows it

A "know-it-all" is ignorant of the fact that he does not know it all.

V. 3

It's not the man who knows about God who has a relationship with Him, but the one who loves God (Jn. 14:23 - *"Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him"*; cp. Rom. 8:28).

Are you known by God? Does He know you to be His child? (cp. Gal. 4:9; II Tim. 2:19).

The proof is not merely in what you know but in who you love.

V. 4

We know an idol has no power to alter the contents of meat offered to it, because an idol is nothing but a piece of stone or wood.

The knowledgeable Christian knows full well that eating meat that was offered to an idol will not affect his salvation, or erase his relationship to Christ.

Paul says, "I'm not endorsing the 'god' by eating meat offered to it; however, if someone might make such an association, I would not do it, lest I offend him.

V. 5

***"Called gods"* =** so-called gods, which really are not at all

In India alone there are over 33 million gods and goddesses. Not one is real, but images stemming from imaginations of people's blind and sinful hearts.

V. 6

"One God" - Christianity is not polytheistic like Hinduism, New Age Movement, or Mormonism; it is monotheistic.

Trinitarianism does not violate or contradict monotheism, as this verse clearly demonstrates.

Note the contrast:

"gods many" (v. 5) . . . *"One God"* (v. 6)
"lords many" (v. 5) . . . *"One Lord"* (v. 6)

--***"the Father of whom"*** - lit. "out of whom" -- the Father is the source from which all things have their origin (Creation owes its origin to the creative mind of God; He planned it).

"Jesus Christ by whom" - The Son is the instrumental cause of all things (Creation owes its existence to the creative power of Christ; He performed it).

"We in Him" - (lit *eis* - "unto" Him) - We were made to exist <u>for</u> (*eis*) God the Father.

"We by Him" - We were made to exist <u>through</u> (*dia*) the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Paul speaks of *"one God"* and *"one Lord"* he is speaking about the same God and the same Lord, thus implicitly teaching the unity of the Godhead (the oneness of the Father and the Son).

V. 7

"There is not in every man that knowledge" - Unfortunately, not everyone (not even every Christian) knows the full truth of verse 6.

"Not being able to shake off the feeling that the idol was somehow real, they felt that they were doing wrong when they ate what had been offered to it" (Morris, p. 127).

You ***"defile"*** (pollute, contaminate) your conscience every time you do something you think you should not (and thereby sin against God).

Even to do something you are not sure about is sin. (Romans 14:23 - *"And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.")*

V. 8

Meat (food, whether offered to idols or not) does not bring you nearer to God if you do eat, or drive you away from Him if you don't. No neutral, non-moral, carnal thing (physical thing) can improve or damage a spiritual relationship by itself.

Vegetarians are <u>not</u> more spiritual than meat-eaters, and vice versa.

II. Pay more attention to RESPONSIBILITY than to your rights (v. 9-12)

V. 9

"Liberty" *(exousia)* = right; to have perfect rights or authority to do something

Who might be ***"weak"*** in the faith?

--new converts
--recovering backsliders
--children

Those who are strong in Christ have to care about those who are weak in Christ.

We must not be all wrapped up in our own wants and rights and forget our responsibility to our brother.

--Would your watching certain TV programs be a stumbling block?

--Would your going to certain theater shows (or renting certain videos) be a stumbling block?

--Would your social drinking be a stumbling block?

--Would your music be a stumbling block?

--Would your work ethic (or lack of one) be a stumbling block?

--Would your dress standards be a stumbling block?

--Would the way your treat your spouse be a stumbling block to your kids?

--Would the friends you have chosen be a stumbling block to you or anyone else?

--Would your hobbies or recreational choices be a stumbling block? (EX: going to public beaches; going to the movies)

--Could you attend a baby baptism or first communion service at a Roman Catholic church?

When we refrain from something (even if there is nothing wrong with it) for the sake of others, we are not acting in legalism (as some would accuse) -- but in agape LOVE!

Beware of associations with things or people that will confuse other believers.

When we demand our rights at the expense of weaker brothers and sisters, we end up:

- Hindering them (v. 9)
- Emboldening them to sin (v. 10)
- Destroying them (v. 11)
- Wounding them (v. 12)
- Offending them (v. 13)

Some may rationalize this way: "Okay, I don't want to be a stumbling block to any of the brothers and sisters at church, so I just won't go to church anymore" (I'll avoid all Christians).

Is this God's solution? Or would His solution be that you remove the stumbling block from your life? Don't remove yourself, remove the sin! You will be a stumbling block of you remove yourself. You will be a discouragement to others being faithful to assembling.

V. 10

"Thee which hast knowledge" - You who are recognized for your spiritual maturity ought to be the most careful of what you allow in your life (what you do and don't do). Someone is looking up to you!

"Emboldened" - Strengthened. The weaker brother will feel he has some ground to stand on, even though he is not quite sure he should be doing what he sees you doing.

A weaker brother will always justify his behavior by your behavior. If he sees it's okay for you to do, then he will assume it's okay for him.

"Sit at meat in the idol's temple" - To recline at a table in a shrine dedicated to an idol.

"It would not be uncommon to be invited to a meal in the temple, as evident from some 'invitation cards' found among the papyri" (Bruce, cited by Reinecker, p. 412).

In the first century, it was an accepted social practice to have meals in a temple, or in some place associated with an idol. It was all part and parcel of the formal etiquette in society." (Morris, p. 123).

The places you go to will associate you with the place and what goes on there, so "Be careful little feet where you go."

Have you been found in any of this world's temples?

Do you sit at meat in questionable places?

A believer has no business in a nightclub, smoke-filled bar, a den of wickedness.

V. 11

"Perish" - be destroyed (in *"conscience"* - v. 12).

The destruction spoken of is in this life. It is not God who destroys this person, but another believer.

A saved *"brother"* cannot lose his salvation, but can have his spiritual life damaged by the practices of an inconsiderate believer.

V. 12

"Wound" - to strike with the first, staff, or whip. The wound you cause may leave a permanent scar on the person you cause to stumble.

"Ye sin" - To do something that someone perceives as wrong is wrong for me to do in their presence (or with their knowledge of it).

I have sinned (in such a case) even though the thing I did was not sinful.

What you do against a believer, you do against Christ.

Paul had this lesson brought home to him on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:4ff) (Morris, p. 129).

When you sin against a believer, you do not merely sin against them, but you sin against the one who died for them, saved them, and lives in them. Why? You lead them to violate their conscience by what you did in your life.

III. Pay more attention to <u>OTHERS</u> than to your self (v. 13)

"I will eat no flesh" - Not merely flesh offered to idols, but meat itself, if it would stumble someone.

Paul often waived his Christian liberties and rights for the sake of others. He would refrain from doing something if it might be misinterpreted, twisted, or be a hindrance in any way to the work of Christ (chapter 9). What great love he had for Christ and others!

Romans 14:21 - *"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."*

Paul's answer is <u>not</u> to ignore the consciences of those narrow-minded, immature, legalistic, critical, judgmental, hawk-eyed, weaker brethren -- but to bend so as not to offend.

God always expects the <u>strong</u> believer to do the bending (not to pamper the weak, but to build him).

"The strong must adapt their behavior to the consciences of the weak" (Morris, p. 130).

The strong should <u>not</u> expect the weak to conform to their higher standards without Biblical instruction (*"knowledge"*).

"There are many things which my conscience, enlightened by grace, permits me to do, but I won't do them because I might offend someone who does not have the same knowledge of grace." (M.R. DeHaan, p. 96).

--Many Mennonites believe that all <u>competitive sports</u> are sinful (I will not play sports in their presence).

--Some churches believe it is unspiritual for a woman to go to church without wearing a <u>hat</u> (my wife would wear a hate in their church).

--There was a time (in the days of the hippies) when having a <u>beard</u> was considered worldly by some believers (in such company, I would not have one).

Don't flaunt your Christian liberty!

The answer: Either correct their lack of knowledge, or yield to their standards.

Love must regulate liberty. You must choose to let love for others dictate what you do or don't do (it may be okay for you, no problem; but if one person perishes over your liberty, you will answer to God for it).

The question is <u>not</u>, "Is this okay for me to do? But "Would this be a help or a hindrance to the ones who are watching me?"

Do you have such an unselfish, gracious, loving spirit?

What are you willing to <u>give up</u> for the glory of Christ and the spiritual advancement of others?

CONCLUSION:

Should I or shouldn't I?

Here are some questions to ask about questionable practices:

<u>Excess</u> - **Will this weigh me down?** Is the activity or habit necessary, or is it merely an extra that is not really important? Is it perhaps only an encumbrance that we should willingly give up (Heb. 12:1)?

<u>Expediency</u> - Is what I want to do helpful and useful, or only desirable?
"All things are lawful for me," Paul says, "but not all things or profitable" or expedient (I Cor. 6:12).

<u>Emulation</u> -Would Jesus do this? *"The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked."* (I Jn. 2:6) If we are doing what Christ would do, our action not only is permissible but good and right.

<u>Example</u> - Are we setting the right example for others, especially for weaker brothers and sisters? If we emulate Christ, others will be able to emulate us, to follow our example (I Tim. 4:12).

<u>Evangelism</u> - Is my testimony going to be helped or hindered? Will unbelievers be drawn to Christ or turned away from Him by what I am doing? Will it help me conduct myself *"with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity"* (Col. 4:5)?

<u>Edification</u> - Will I be built up and matured in Christ; will I become spiritually stronger? *"All things are lawful, but not all things edify"* (I Cor. 10:23).

<u>Exaltation</u> -Will the Lord be lifted up and glorified in what I do? God's glory and exaltation should be the supreme purpose behind everything we do. *"Whether then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"* (I Cor. 10:31).

(<u>Enslavement</u>) - Will this action control me?
"*I will not be brought under the power of any"* (I Cor. 6:12)

[List by John MacArthur]