

Stumbling Blocks **Verses 1-2, 3a**

Jesus warns His disciples that temptation is coming. The word for “temptations to sin” used here is the Greek word “skandalon” (a stick that triggers a trap or snare). It carries the meaning of a “stumbling block” or a person who traps someone or causes one to stumble in their faith or be drawn away from Christ. After Jesus told His disciples that He would die/raise, Peter rebuked Him: *This shall never happen to you saying. But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance (skandalon) to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”* Satan/Peter would not be a stumbling block, hindrance, to deter Jesus from following God’s will and going to the cross. The Pharisees (last week), with their love of money, false teaching, criticism of Jesus, and the other such ungodliness they displayed, were stumbling blocks that could lead people away from truly following Christ. These, along with any temptation to worldliness, idolatry, false teaching, or anything else leading away from living in true faith and devotion to Christ would surely come to the disciples. They were to be aware of that. As should we. Like it was for them, the nature of our world today is opposed to God, so there will inevitably be occasions to be tempted to sin all the time, at every turn. *We must be aware, always on guard, always spiritually alert. The moment we let our guard down, is the moment we are most vulnerable. Because we are assailed every day with temptations to sin, and*

because we are sinners prone to give in to it, we need to get into the Word...a lot! **Counterfeit** *We also need to fight our pride and give fellow Christians permission to speak truth into our lives when they see a temptation that we may be vulnerable to or unaware of.*

Jesus had major care and concern for the “little ones” (may refer to children, more likely it also includes those tax collectors/sinners of **15.1** who were coming to hear Christ, new believers young in the faith, or really any disciple/believer because we are all as dependent as a helpless, little child upon Him). So for those through whom the temptation to sin comes to lead these “little ones” away from Christ, Jesus pronounced a woe on them. Literally being drowned with a millstone (*heavy stone used for grinding grain*) hung around your neck would be better than causing one of these little ones to stumble. **Paint that picture.** Facing that horrible, physical death would be better than the woe pronounced on he/she who leads even ONE little one away from Christ. Wow. This is serious stuff to Jesus. His care for these little ones is clear. He was telling His disciples to not to give in to the sin of the Pharisees or any other sin, that they not be stumbling blocks who would lead people away from Jesus by their false teaching/sinful lifestyle examples. That may have been what He meant when He said in **v. 3, pay attention to yourselves!** They needed to take heed, as should we. We need to pay attention to ourselves so that we aren’t a “skandalon,” stumbling block, to others.

Paul speaks of our freedom to eat certain foods that others think are unlawful to eat. (Rom 14:13) *Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance (skandalon) in the way of a brother.* Though you may be allowed Scripturally to do something, if another doesn't see it that way and them seeing you do it causes them to stumble in their faith, we shouldn't do it. Our attitude shouldn't be: "I can do it," but "Will my doing it cause another to stumble?" Deference to one another. Love over liberty. (Rom 14:15) *For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.* (Ironsides) *Do not parade your liberty before another who is likely to be influenced wrongly by your behavior.* The ability to eat/drink certain things is nowhere near worth derailing someone from following Christ faithfully. **Example: Drinking.**

We are stumbling blocks to others when we stumble into following false teachers and influence others around us with their teaching. (Rom 16:17) *I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles (skandalon) contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.* We are stumbling blocks to others when our lifestyle promotes the love of money like the Pharisees had or any other worldly lifestyle, attitude, or practice. Politics? We are stumbling blocks to others when we are just indifferent to encouraging them to pursue

righteousness. Oh, we must pay attention to ourselves. (1 Tim 4:16) *Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.* Temptations to sin and fall away from Christ are going to come, but WE aren't to be the ones through whom they come. Those who persecute believers, or those who teach wrong doctrine, or those who profess Christ but live hypocritical, worldly lifestyles and unChristlike attitudes and actions, or those that seduce and set traps for believers...All these to derail believers from faithfully following Jesus will come, but WE aren't to be the people through whom they come. When we influence others to sin, we do exactly what Satan does. Influencing believers to sin is a serious thing. Remember the millstone.

You have influence over so many in your life. *We are either barriers or bridges, blocking people from obeying Jesus or helping make the way easier for someone to obey Jesus.* We can't excuse ourselves as barriers to others obeying Christ by saying: "I'm only human" or "I don't mean any harm" or "can't I be selfish just one time?" or any other excuse. We need desperately to live faithfully before others that we don't intentionally or unintentionally lead them astray. Your life isn't just "your life" to live as you want. It's primarily for the glory of God. And your life is a **Billboard** *What does the billboard of your life scream to others? That's what you're teaching them, and what you're teaching them is either bridging them to obeying Jesus or blocking them*

from obeying Him. You have one lifetime to influence as many as you can to follow Jesus. Pay attention to yourselves! Get in the Word. Pray for the sanctifying work of the Spirit. Love the Lord your God with ALL your heart, ALL your soul, ALL your might. Love your neighbor as yourself. Walk like Jesus walked. Don't just allow, but beg other believers to warn you against temptations to which they see you are vulnerable.

Forgiveness **Verses 3-4**

Jesus then speaks on rebuking, repenting, and forgiving. It's possible that the *pay attention to yourselves* goes along with these verses, that we are to pay attention to each other and rebuke/restore those we see sinning. Certainly we are to take care of one another, share with each other the Word that teaches, rebukes, corrects, and trains us in righteousness (2 Tim 3.16). We are to guard each other from teaching and living like the Pharisees and being stumbling blocks to others. We are to exhort one another every day so we aren't hardened by the deceitfulness of sin and have evil, unbelieving hearts (Heb 3:12-13). We are to stir one another up to love and good works, encouraging one another (Heb 10.24-25). Titus and Timothy were called as leaders to the gracious act of rebuking. (Gal 6:1) *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.* While it could be that rebuking and restoring one for any sin may be in view

here, a good case could also be made that the focus is what to do when someone sins against you. That is where we will go with it from here.

When someone sins against us, we don't go tattle to others, even though that's easy/tempting. We don't take it to Facebook in a passive/aggressive way. *Come on Christian, be different!* We don't harbor grudges. No, we obey Jesus: (Matt 18:15) *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.* We don't avoid confrontation because it's hard. We go to the one who offended us, telling them their fault in a gracious rebuke, not forgetting our Christian duty to love: (1 Cor 13:4-5) *Love is patient and kind...it is not arrogant or rude.* We go in patience, kindness, not arrogant or rude. (Cole) *The goal of rebuking another believer is not "to get it off your chest." It is not "to give him a piece of your mind." It is not to prove that you're right and he's wrong. It is not to win so that next time you have some ammunition to use in the heat of battle. The goal is to bring your brother to repentance, to restore his relationship with the Lord, with you, and with others.* So much drama, anger, hurt, division could be avoided by doing it this way.

And if when you go to rebuke them they repent, we are to freely offer the forgiveness of Christ. Even if they sin against us seven times in a day, we are to be people who are ready to forgive each time. Sure, forgiving someone

three times was honorable in Judaism, but we are to go way beyond that. We aren't to keep a record of wrongs. We are to maintain a readiness to forgive at all times.

Matt 18.21-35 No sin committed against sinful us is anywhere close to our sin against the holy God. Yet in Christ, He has forgiven us. (Col 2:13–14) *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.*

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. **Record of debt**

Gospel God sent Jesus to do that great work that this could come to pass: (Psalm 103:12) *as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.* And He keeps forgiving when we confess. (1 John 1:9) *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all*

unrighteousness. So we respond like Paul calls us to:

(Eph 4:32) *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

(Jesus, Model Prayer - Matt 6:12) *and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.* So

continual repentance from those who sin against us should be met with a great willingness to give continual forgiveness to them. Why? Because we have been forgiven much by God and continually are forgiven much by God. Forgiveness is not primarily so YOU don't have to carry around the burden. NO! That's a selfish motive. True, when we forgive we let go of a

heavy weight. But forgiveness is primarily to model our Savior. So no matter how we feel, we decide to let the offense go, dismiss the case from court, like God has done for us.

Realizing that their sin is ultimately against God should lead us to want mercy and forgiveness for them from God, which helps us give mercy and forgiveness more freely. Seeing being sinned against as a trial that God can use to sanctify us can help us not be as offended, making it easier to forgive. And knowing that if we withhold forgiveness from others when they sin against us, God will withhold His forgiveness from us helps us be more forgiving (**Matt 6.14-15, explain**).

But what if they don't repent? Do we forgive only when they repent? Like God made provision to forgive us in Christ before we repented, so we too make provision to forgive others even before they repent. We get rid of bitterness toward those who sin against us, love them, look at them with mercy, seek their good, pray for them, treat them with kindness, that when they repent, all that's left to do is to freely grant them forgiveness.

The world is sinful and those in it will sin against you. People will unjustly hurt you deeply because of their sin and cause deep pain and offense. Sometimes, however, our hurt is not only because the other is a sinner, but because we selfishly get deeply offended when what you do takes away what I think I'm entitled to. In a world ready to choose up sides against one another,

Christians need to model forgiveness. Forgiveness is hard, really hard. Yet showing the great forgiveness of God to those who sin against us shines like a bright light in this dark world that is looking for reasons to be offended and not be forgiving. Fellow believers, we are called to do the hard work, in the power of the Spirit, and show the radical forgiveness of God by forgiving others. We don't do it perfectly, and as such, we have sinned. Likewise, we have been stumbling blocks to others and have led them astray. But by His grace, He has forgiven us through the gracious work of Christ. What grace. So in response, let's pay attention to ourselves, that we aren't stumbling blocks that keep others from following Him. And let's seek to give the forgiveness that He so graciously and freely has given us that others may realize their need for it as well.