

# Don't set Stumbling blocks

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The Bible has a LOT to say about setting stumbling blocks in front of brethren. We know God teaches us to accept, love, help, encourage one another. But sometimes – we may be setting out stumbling blocks for our brothers and sisters and others and *not even be as aware of it as we should* be. So it's time to have a sermon on it. The Bible has a LOT to say about stumbling blocks. This was originally going to be a “blog” – but there is so much in the Bible about it, that I morphed it into this sermon or teaching.

I preach to myself in this sermon. We all have probably placed stumbling blocks out there, inadvertently causing people to sin because of our actions, or our impatience, or our anger, or our gossip – or our outright enticement of others to go along with you to do something their conscience could not allow. And something not pleasing to God in their case.

So greetings everyone and welcome to Light on the Rock. I'm Philip Shields, founder and host of Light on the Rock where **I focus on our relationship with God and his Son Jesus Christ (or I often use his Hebrew name Yeshua) and a strong relationship with one another.** These are the two greatest commands –to love God and love one another, summarizing the 10 commandments.

God is very, very clear – as you'll soon hear/see – that He gets very upset when we place a stumbling block in front of anyone, especially his children.

**A “stumbling block” is something we do or don't do that can cause a brother or sister to fall, falter, or be tempted,** or to go from there to actually sin, or to quit their relationship with God. In this blog I will set a few examples. The purpose of this blog is to make each of us – including me – so much more aware of stumbling blocks than we might be using or being.

I need you to also be aware that the son of God was himself a rock of stumbling to those who would not accept him as the Messiah. *I'm not referring to that kind of stumbling block* – where people reject the Messiah and stumble because of him. (Romans 9:32-33). I'm talking about when WE cause a rock of stumbling by our actions and words.

But now if WE lay down a stumbling block, we're committing a deep sin. We are saved by grace, not works. I know that. But we are rewarded by the things we do. So many scriptures say that. Reward is not salvation, but is what we will be and will be doing in God's kingdom for eternity. Putting out stumbling blocks can have very terrible consequences for us, impacting the reward we may have received from God – or worse, as you'll see.

I believe *each of us* has set out stumbling blocks. Even I have. If you think you really have not, read on.

**Leviticus 19:14** “You shall not curse the deaf, **nor put a stumbling block before the blind**, but shall fear your God: I am YHVH”.

Some people sometimes place offenses and *spiritual* stumbling blocks in front of the spiritually blind people. Paul addresses this:

**Romans 14:12-13**

“So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. 13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, **but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.**”

Here's what the Son of God said in context of children.

**Matthew 18:6-7**

“**Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin**, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!”

So you see, causing someone to sin is ultra-serious. Yes, I'd rather speak on God's favor, or on love, or on powerful faith, but this topic of stumbling blocks also needs to also be addressed.

### **EXAMPLES of Stumbling blocks**

**What are examples or KINDS of stumbling blocks** we may be putting out there?

Tempting or causing someone to sin is a stumbling block. Or it may be about something we feel is OK for us to do, but we know is a problem for that other person. That can become a stumbling block too.

**Examples** would include **alcohol**. To drink a little bit of wine or spirits is OK. Jesus/Yeshua's first miracle was turning water into the best wine ever (John 2). That could not have been just grape juice. But some people should not try to drink any alcohol, at any time. So an example is – urging someone to have a drink when you know they were raised to never drink alcohol. Drinking even a sip could hurt their conscience. Or maybe he/she is an alcoholic. “Come on, you can handle one drink! It's not going to hurt ya!” But that action could cause him to go home later and drink til he's drunk because of you urging him to have that drink. Maybe he could have been arrested for drunk driving. Maybe a terrible accident could have resulted.

Another example of stumbling blocks we could be setting is **flirting** with someone's wife (or really, anyone) whom you sense has a sexual weakness and likes to flirt as well, or you sense she may even kinda like you! MANY men and women are flirts. Please admit it. It often leads to sex sin at least in the mind if not actual acts of sin. Flirting includes saying things that are a double entendre, a double meaning. You flirts out there know what I'm talking about. We have to repent of it and stop. It can definitely lead to serious sin down the road.

Balaam in the Bible (Numbers 25) used this means to place a huge stumbling block for Israel. Revelation 2 and 3 is to the 7 churches of Asia Minor (now Turkey) and notice what is said to Pergamos church:

**Revelation 2:14**

“But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the **doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel**, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.”

Balaam taught Balak that “hey, combine your Baal idol worship with your scantily clad pretty young women, and maybe even tell the Israelites that sexual acts were part of your worship to your god – and you're sure to get them doing things that will anger their God.” You can read the story in **Numbers 25. Yes, this caused the death of many thousands.**

**Ladies of God, some women – even some “church women” – dress in such a provocative way that boys and men are enticed to look them over from head to toe with lustful thoughts.** That's placing stumbling blocks.

A godly woman would not want that to happen and so would dress modestly.

Both apostles Peter and Paul discuss this, so this is also something that we should be discussing in our congregations today.

**1 Peter 3:3-6** tells God's women to not just emphasize outward apparel but on having a beautiful HEART, which is what God prizes.

**1 Timothy 2:8-10**

"I desire therefore that **the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands**, without wrath and doubting;

9 in like manner also, that the **women adorn themselves in modest apparel**, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, 10 but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works."

MODEST apparel. Not fancy hairdos and costly apparel – but what would make people instantly think you must be a godly woman!

Examples of enticement and IMMODESTY would be to wear a blouse or top that shows **cleavage**; a skirt, dress or shorts that is so short that men everywhere are looking you over -- and maybe some of you women crave that attention! Check your heart.

Certainly men *should be able to look elsewhere and resist* temptation -- but why tempt them? But men, listen again – regardless of what women may do, it gives us NO excuse to let our minds lust. Or, women, when you have company over, to be wearing **a mini-skirt or shorts so short** so when you sit down it draws attention from the men and boys.

This is what I'm talking about. **And Beach wear** – some outfits look like they're made of a band-aid and dental floss! I guarantee you, that becomes a stumbling block to a host of boys and men of all ages. I suppose men could dress in a provocative way too. **Women, help us OUT! Don't cause stumbling blocks. Don't cause potential wrong thoughts – not just at church but any time.** I doubt other ministers speak on this much, but Paul and Peter did, so why shouldn't I?

Placing stumbling blocks may even include urging God's family to do **something that is OK for you – but would hurt their conscience** and therefore would be sin for them (Romans 14:27). Everything we do must be with good conscience and good faith. So Romans says even if something is lawful, if it would offend others – then just don't do it!

**FOOD and DRINK** can cause stumbling. Romans addressed MEAT that had previously been offered to idols. My point in using this example is that Paul clearly explains that something may be OK for some but not a good idea for others. Remember for some, the idol was nothing and they could eat the meat. Others would have a very painful conscience if they ate of it though. Listen...

**1 Corinthians 8:9-13**

***“But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.***

10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?

11 And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

12 **But when you thus SIN against the brethren**, and wound their weak conscience, ***you sin against CHRIST.***

13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”

**Look at verse 12** again. Causing a brother or sister to sin is ***sinning against Christ himself***, for they are part of his body.

**Romans 14:8** says *we each belong to the Lord*, whether we live or die so we need to be ultra-careful not to cause offenses. Yes, I preach to myself here too! I suggest you study Romans 14 very carefully, which addresses this very point of stumbling blocks.

In **Romans 12:4-5** Paul reminds us of this:

“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so **we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.**”

When we hurt someone, we’re really hurting ourselves and attacking Christ.

So even if you know drinking wine or beer is OK, DON’T drink alcohol in the presence of someone who would think you are sinning. And don’t do it in front of an alcoholic either, who is trying to abstain from all alcohol. Or just do without.

**Romans 14:21** CJB “What is good is not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.”

In the end, Apostle Paul teaches us that the kingdom of God is not in eating and drinking (**Romans 14:17**) or about what you eat or drink– but we should consider other people’s feelings and not be making a big deal about these things.).

**Romans 14:12-13 CJB**

“So then, every one of us will have to give an account of himself to God. 13 Therefore, let’s stop passing judgment on each other! Instead, make this one judgment – not to put a stumbling block or a snare in a brother’s way.”

**1 Corinthians 10:31-33**

“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, **do everything for God’s glory.** 32 **Give no offense** to the Jews or the Greeks or the church of God, 33 just as I also try to please all people in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved”

What a great concept. Paul tried to please people – whether Jew or Greek – as long as it wasn’t sin. It worked out to God’s glory.

**Romans 14 and 1 Cor. 10** are two good chapters to read to learn more about not causing offenses and stumbling blocks. Romans 12 also.

So take this opportunity to **ask God to show you** where you may be causing others to stumble and sin. I’m praying that prayer too!

**Causing others to stumble is evidence we need to grow in much more LOVE** – for the person and to God himself. Causing stumbling blocks shows there are areas of our lives that are not walking in the light of God. I’ve had to repent of that, each time I’ve caused offenses.

**1 John 2:9-10**

“If anyone claims, ‘I am living in the light,’ but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is still living in darkness. 10 Anyone who loves another brother or sister is living in the light and does not cause others to stumble.”

There it is. Live in such a way, “in the light” – that doesn’t cause offense, doesn’t cause others to stumble. ALL of us can get better at that, including me.

We can also cause stumbling certainly by our WORDS, how we talk to others, what we say. Again, pray that God open your heart and mind to see areas of your life where you’re being careless in this point.

One of the scariest verses in the Bible (to me) is James 3:1 where we are urged to be careful about wanting to be a teacher – for we will be judged more strictly.

So yes, I have to be careful, and I have to repent from time to time of saying or doing things that can cause occasions of stumbling. If I can admit it, I'm hoping you can admit it too. I believe a host of people just go through life not thinking that much about it though.

### **MORE WAYS we can cause stumbling**

**Weaponizing marital sex** is one. Don't withhold marital sex from one another except for prayer and fasting. There should no longer be brethren saying to their spouse: "You sleep on the couch tonight" – or "because of what you did, you're not having sex for a long time." Wrong, wrong, wrong. Work it out. Don't go to bed angry. Work it out. This could lead the other – out of weakness or spite – to commit adultery. That's not me saying it, but Paul does.

#### **1 Corinthians 7:1-6 Holman**

About the things you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have relations with a woman."

2 But because of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband.

3 A husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise a wife to her husband.

4 *A wife does not have authority over her own body, but her husband does. Equally, a husband does not have authority over his own body, but his wife does.*

5 **Do NOT deprive one another**—except when you agree, for a time, to devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again; ***otherwise, Satan may tempt you because of your lack of self-control.***

Now nothing justifies a man or woman feeling they need this so badly that they go commit adultery. Nothing justifies that. But DO notice that depriving one another of marital love can make it easier for Satan to tempt you!

Withholding marital sex from your spouse can cause him or her to be tempted to give in to the temptation brought on by Satan, who knows he/she is more susceptible to adultery at this point. I wonder how many adulteries have been caused by the fact that one partner just refuses to make love as often as the other one requires. Paul pretty much says this, doesn't he?

So DON'T weaponize marital sex. It's a huge stumbling block. It can lead to all sorts of troubles. I wish I'd hear more ministers speak out on this.

### **BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER**

Let's talk about another stumbling block. This one lures people into just plain giving up, leaving the body of Christ permanently. Maybe they were told to leave the fellowship for whatever reasons and then were never welcomed back.

The church not FORGIVING someone and welcoming him back can become a major stumbling block for the unforgiven one. It can lead that person to just give up on God, on God's church, and on himself. For some, it could even lead to suicide. I realize nowadays there are lots of congregations one could go to – but still, if some really need that forgiveness, that can be crucial to their survival.

2 Corinthians 2 discusses keeping certain people permanently out of the fellowship of that particular group or body of Christ. A man in Corinth had been thrown out for sexual immorality – 1 Corinthians 5. But by the time Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, the man was *still* outside the fellowship and was not being welcomed back, though he had repented and ceased his immoral behavior.

Part of the problem is that some ministers decide for themselves whether or not they feel a disfellowshipped person has repented or not.

So Paul here is going to urge the Corinthian church to welcome back this past offender whom God had forgiven, and to welcome him back with LOVE – lest he be overcome with too much sorrow!

#### **2 Corinthians 2:6-11 NIV**

The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him.

7 Now instead, **you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.** 8 I urge you, therefore, to ***reaffirm your love for him.***

9 The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. 10 If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven – **if there was anything to forgive – I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, 11 *in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.***



So you see how serious this can be. This same principle can be applied to members of your physical family whom some have thrown out of fellowship. If there's been a change and that person asks for your acceptance back, with prayer – reconcile. Get back together.

Be a person who brings people together, not a person splitting people apart. Be a gatherer, not a scatterer. Live a life of forgiving others and accepting others. NONE of us is perfect. Don't give place for the Devil to have any advantage on anyone.

Satan means "Adversary". He's our enemy. Let's not give him anything! Don't let the Enemy put bad thoughts in our heads about other children of God. Even when we're upset with someone, let's do our best not to jump to conclusions or pass judgment.

### **OUR WORDS CAN HEAL OR HURT**

Finally – our words – things we say out loud, or to others, or in texts, on social media, or in gossip. These can become horrible stumbling blocks, once said.

This one point can be an entire sermon. We all need to learn to *pause, think first, before we speak – especially when we're upset*. We type A personalities just charge on it. I certainly can.

Quick to listen. Slow to speak. Especially if you're feeling anger welling up. We all have to learn this better. Certainly I need to do this better.

#### **James 1:19-20 International Standard Version**

"You must understand this, my dear brothers. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. For human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."

So I just hope this will lead us to our knees and ask God to reveal where we're causing offense, setting stumbling blocks, especially those we may not even be aware of right now.

There are many more areas I could discuss. We get into offenses over Doctrinal differences, for example; especially on the right calendar, God's name, tithing, and a host of others. Sometimes we have to move on and not let those differences keep us apart.

So whether it is the way we eat and drink around each other, or how modest or immodest our attire is, or how we talk about things, or withholding marital

love from one another, or keeping someone permanently out of your fellowship and the many other things I mentioned – let's be aware of stumbling blocks!

The goal is for the Bride of Christ to come together in loving harmony as soon as we can, so as ONE BODY we can meet the Christ returning in the clouds of heaven in faith, in love, as one.

**1 John 2:9-10**

“If anyone claims, ‘I am living in the light,’ but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is still living in darkness. 10 **Anyone who loves another brother or sister is living in the light and does not cause others to stumble.**”

Closing prayer.