

Jacob's Well

Lesson Title: Biblical Principles—Being a Stumbling Block



Key Concept: Applications may change, but biblical principles are useful in all times and locations. Being a stumbling block is making the gospel of Jesus Christ harder than necessary for those who need it.



Scriptures:

Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ.

(1 Corinthians 9:19 *New Living Translation*)

⁸Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

(1 Corinthians 8:8–9 *English Standard Version*)

Context Scriptures: Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8–9; 2 Corinthians 6:3–10



Lesson Thoughts:

“Don’t be a stumbling block.” We hear these words a lot as Christians. They are often used to police behaviors such as how you wear your hair, celebrating Halloween or Christmas, watching TV, or just about anything that someone else in the body of Christ finds wrong or offensive. If a person is upset or disagrees with your behavior, then you have become a stumbling block. But how is this principle of being a “stumbling block” used in the Bible? What does it really mean?

The apostle Paul uses the term “stumbling block” several times in his Epistles to teach disciples in Christ how to interact with their fellow Christians and consider the effects of their actions on each other. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 8 that we must “take care that this right of [ours] does not somehow become a stumbling

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block to the weak." So, it is not entirely off-base to say that we need to pay attention to our decisions and our actions' effects on our companions in Christ.

We err, however, if we do not read on into 1 Corinthians 9. Paul talks about the importance of sacrificing our freedom for the profit of the body. He is free to seek his own good (1 Corinthians 10:23–24), but he chooses to become a Jew for the Jews, a Gentile for the Gentiles, and weak for the weak; Paul is "all things to all people so that by all possible means [he] might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:20–22). We see, then, that when Paul says "stumbling block," he's not discussing offending or upsetting those saints long-established in the church. He is talking instead about evangelism, about the salvation of those he is trying to reach.

The popular application of "stumbling block" is often used to discuss things that those we are evangelizing would not stumble over (hair, holidays, TV). Yet some of the hard lines we draw along such issues—issues not explicitly touched in the Bible—make it hard for us to connect with those in the world.

One last word from Paul: "Let's stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall" (Romans 14:13). Being a stumbling block is not offending an established fellow member of the body; it is making the gospel of Jesus Christ harder than necessary for those who need it.

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) What are some things we often call stumbling blocks? Are they really stumbling blocks? Why or why not?
- 2) How does it feel when somebody accuses you of being/makes you feel like a stumbling block? How could this make new members of the body feel?
- 3) In Paul's explanation, who is the weaker person: someone who is a stumbling block or someone who is tripped up by a stumbling block? Explain.
- 4) What are some ways we can call newer members to grow in Christ without ourselves being a stumbling block?

Next Lesson: Guarding Your Identity

Notes and Reflections

- 1) Think of things in your life that you have considered stumbling blocks. Are they leading anybody to sin or stray from God? If they aren't, are they really stumbling blocks?

- 2) As you go through the week, be aware of things that could be stumbling blocks to the people you witness to.

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Notes and Reflections, cont.