

Stumbling Blocks

Only Offending in Love

November 7, 2021

Today we're talking about *offending in love!*

Feel guilty lately? Eat anything **unhealthy**? Watch anything **unwholesome**? Do anything **unloving**? Say anything **untruthful**? Buy anything **unwise**? Okay, so if you had your choice right now, which of these two little gifts would you choose for yourself: a pencil or a Purell hand wipe?



A study was published in the research publication, *Science* (9/8/06) titled: **Washing Away Your Sins: Threatened Morality and Physical Cleansing**, wherein subjects read a short story about a lawyer who finds a document that can save his partner. And in the *first* version, he *saves* his colleague's case. In the *second* version, he *shreds* the document, and double-crosses his partner. After reading the story, the subjects could pick up a free gift: a pencil or an antiseptic wipe. Interestingly, 2/3 of those who read the faithful-friend version took a pencil. But 2/3 who read the sleazy version chose the hand wipe over the pencil ... which, of course, was a "No. 2". Along with several similar experiments, they found that **unethical behavior tends to bring cleansing to mind**, and maybe explains why the world uses words like *dirty*, *filthy*, and *soiled* to describe sleaze and sexual immorality, and why King David, after committing *adultery* and *murder*, cried out to the Lord:

*Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ... You desire truth in the inner parts; You teach me wisdom in the inmost place. ... Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ... Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me ... and grant me a *willing* spirit, to *sustain* me. – Psalm 51:2-12 NIV*

Our conscience is a God-given gift to help guide, warn, challenge, and keep us clean. But, unlike *His Spirit*, *ours'* is **fallible** and **fragile** and **flexible**. We're given a basic system when we're born; but as we grow we're responsible for training *it up* in the way we should go. Paul writes:

As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am *fully convinced* that *no* food is *unclean* in itself. [Which is why he says he has no problem eating *real* food dedicated to *false* idols] But if *anyone* regards something as unclean, then for *him* it *is* unclean. – Romans 14:14 NIV

[But hold on; in Revelation we have] The Words of Him who has the sharp two-edged Sword. [It's Jesus] "... you have some there [in the Pergamum church] who hold the *teaching of Balaam*, [famous for arguing with a donkey ()] who taught [King] Balak to put a *stumbling block* before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. ... Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the Sword of My mouth. – Revelation 2:12-16 ESV

So how's Paul *so convinced* that eating food sacrificed to idols is good with God? Because it's about the conscience, not the cuisine. Balaam taught the enemy **to conquer God's people by enticing them to violate their conscience**. So, know how Paul's so fully convinced?

[His conscience knows that Jesus said] "... that *nothing* that enters a person from the *outside* can *defile* them? For it doesn't go into their *heart* but into their *stomach*, and then out of the body." [And] (In saying this, *Jesus declared all foods clean.*) – Mark 7:18-19 NIV

Which is why Paul says: "As one who is in the [Words of the Sword of the mouth of the] Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that *no food is unclean in itself.*" Followed by, "Pass the bacon wrapped shrimp!" "But [your conscience may not be as equipped, so] if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean", until the Lord's double-edged Sword straightens out their double-minded ignorance, which strengthens their onboard guidance system. Peter continued to exasperate Jesus, long after His death and resurrection. To prepare Peter to go to the gentiles, he was given a vision of the Lord telling him to eat the *food* of gentiles.



He replied, "Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth." [As opposed to the things coming out of it] The voice spoke from heaven a second time, [Oy veh!] "Do not call *anything* impure that God has made *clean.*" – Acts 11:7-9 NIV



You see, **the uninformed are expected to grow in knowledge and wisdom.** Whereas **the informed are expected to grow in love and compassion,** which results in a heartfelt desire to reach out and relate to the uninformed, in order to help them grow. Ever wonder why we eat ham on Easter? To declare that Jesus fulfilled the law, and has the power and authority to make the unclean clean. Plus it's *delicious!* In the verse immediately before Paul says he's *fully convinced*, he says:



Let us not *judge* one another *anymore*, but rather resolve *this*, not to put a stumbling block or [in other words] a cause to fall in our brother's way. – Romans 14:13 NKJ

If someone you know is blind, you don't get to rearrange their furniture. "But they have no sense of feng shui *whatsoever!*" That's okay. They're blind. And you're gonna trip 'em if you're not careful. **Jesus didn't give us a comprehensive list of do's and don'ts.** It's "worse". **He gave us a set of principles.** We have to listen to our *conscience* and do what it says; while continuing to *train* it and *strengthen* it with *truth*. It's one thing to "not murder". *Check!* But *we're* told that:

Anyone who *hates* his brother *is* a murderer, and you *know* that *no* murderer has eternal *life* in him. [And] *This* is how we know what love *is*: Jesus Christ *laid down* His *life* for *us*. And we ought to lay down *our* lives for our *brothers*. – 1 John 3:15-16 NIV

It's not simply a matter of *me* deciding if something is okay for *me* ... **I must assess, to my best, whether it'll distress the people I influence.** It's similar to how the same aroma, like gasoline, can smell good to some (like those raised in a wrecking yard) while totally offending others.

[So] If your brother is *distressed* [which is more than just *offended*] because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. [And *that's the heart of the matter*] Do not by *your* eating destroy *your* brother [by causing quarrels or violations of conscience] ... For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of *righteousness*, [not causing sin] *peace* [not causing offense and arguments] and *joy* [not causing regret and sorrow] in the Holy Spirit, because *anyone* who *serves* Christ in *this* way is *pleasing* to God and *approved* by *men*. – Romans 14:15-18 NIV

[But then Paul turns around and says] Am I now trying to *win the approval of men*, or of God? Or am I trying to *please men*? If I were still trying to *please men*, I would *not* be a *servant of Christ*. – Galatians 1:10 NIV

Almost sounds like he's contradicting himself. But he's *not*. Because *we're* not to compromise *truth to keep the peace*, because then *we would not* be *servants of Christ* ... who was perhaps the biggest stumbling block of all time. We're told that ...

They *stumbled* over the "*stumbling stone*." As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that *causes men to stumble* and a *rock that makes them fall*" – Romans 9:32-33 NIV

So, why does Jesus get to be a stumbling block? He doesn't "get" to be; He just *is*.



Coming to Him as to a living stone, *rejected* indeed by [offended] men, but *chosen by God* and *precious* ... Therefore it is *also* contained in the Scripture, [Is 28:16] "Behold, I lay in Zion A *chief cornerstone*, elect, *precious*, and he who *believes* on Him will by no means be put to shame." Therefore, to you who *believe*, He is *precious*; but to those who are *disobedient*, [Ps 118:22] "The *stone* which the *builders rejected* Has become the *chief cornerstone*," and [Is 8:14] "A *stone of stumbling* and a *rock of offense*." They *stumble*, being *disobedient* to the *Word*, – 1 Peter 2:4-8 NKJ

There's a good stumbling block and a bad. And it has everything to do with discerning the difference between the disputable matters of man, and the non-negotiables of God. And we should never confuse the two. Like the time Jesus told Peter the Scriptures regarding the cross.

"This shall never happen to You!" [The exclamation point shows he really thinks he's on the right side of this issue; but] Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; [because] you do not have in mind the things [of the wisdom] of God, but the [ignorant] things of men." – Matthew 16:22-23 NIV

The act of causing someone to violate their conscience might seem like no big deal, but enticing someone to defy their God-given early-warning-system is wrong on so many levels. There's a big difference between saying "C'mon, it's Halloween; watch the movie with us. It won't hurt you." and "C'mon, it's Sunday; come to church with us. It won't hurt you." **Convincing someone to compromise their conscience for our convenience is sinful and selfish.** Whereas **trying to help them grow in understanding and trust of truth is righteous.** Even if they take offense in the process. If they're offended by your love and concern, while your mind is on the things of God, then *they* get charged with "*jay walking*". You see, **if a jay-walker steps in front of my car and I hit 'em, they get charged with a crime.** But if I see 'em in time to swerve, and I *still* hit 'em ... *I* get charged with the crime. So, when a vulnerable believer steps between me and my fully-convinced freedom, **I'm called to swerve and protect**, in order to safeguard *their* faith. And *this* is because **I'm commanded to be unswerving in my commitment to walk in the light of the love of Christ.** Paul declared that "*today is the Day of Salvation*". (2 Cor 6:2) And Jesus said:

"If anyone walks in the day, he does not *stumble*, because *he* sees the *light* of this world. But if one walks in the *night*, he *stumbles*, because the *light* is not *in* him." – John 11:9-10 NKJ

“Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. Believe in the light while you have the light, *so that* you may *become* children of light.” – John 12:35-36 NIV

And walking in the truth means standing up to non-truth, when *God* gives us the *timing* and the *means* and the *wisdom* to do so in *love*, in *His* name, as *His* servant-ambassadors. Jesus said:

“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” – Matthew 10:34 NIV

The ol’ double-edged Sword of God’s Word that comes straight from His mouth. Because **the Prince of Peace came to shake things up**. Because *peacemakers* must *sometimes* be troublemakers.



When Paul was called in, [on trial in Caesarea] Tertullus presented his case before Felix: “We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and ... We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world.” – Acts 24:2-5 NIV



So if my mind is truly set on the godly things, **it’s okay to be a troublemaker-peacemaker**. It’s not a sin to *trouble* a drowning swimmer with a life ring – even if they reject *it*, and are offended by *you* for thinking *they* needed *it*. And yet, **it is a sin to repeatedly hit ‘em over the head with it**. “YOU! DO! TOO! NEED! THIS!” And yet-yet, Paul says: “We preach Christ *crucified*, to the *Jews* a *stumbling block*,” (1 Cor 1:23) And he also calls it: “*the offense of the cross*”. (Gal 5:11) Did you know there was a *literal rock of offense* and a *stone of stumbling* at the crucifixion?



[Joseph of Arimathea] laid [Jesus] in a *tomb* which had been *hewn* out of the *rock*, and rolled a *stone* against the door of the [rock hewn] *tomb*. – Mark 15:46 NKJ

But they found the *stone* rolled away from the [rock hewn] *tomb*. – Luke 24:2 NKJ

To those who believe, that empty-rock and rolled-stone represent *power* and *authority* and *eternal life*. But those who *don’t* can only associate ‘em with the *offensive stench* of *death*.

For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the *one* we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. – 2 Corinthians 2:15-16 NKJ

Truth stinks to those who reject it. And truth hurts. And truth offends. And even though we’re commanded and warned not to cause someone to stumble by pressuring them to violate their conscience; **we peacemakers are expected to trouble those we love with truth**.

[Therefore] let us draw *near* to God with a *sincere* heart in *full assurance* of faith, having *our* hearts sprinkled to *cleanse us* from a *guilty conscience* and having our bodies *washed* with *pure water*. Let us hold *unswervingly* to the *hope* we *profess*, for He who promised *is* faithful. And *let* us consider *how* we may spur one *another on* toward *love* and *good deeds*. Let us *not* give up meeting *together*, as *some* are in the *habit* of doing, but let *us encourage* one another – Hebrews 10:19-25 NIV