

Stumbling-Blocks

By Elder David Pyles

But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. – Rom 14:10-13

These verses say that rather than being in the business of judging each other, we ought to be helping each other toward faring better at the future judgment we all surely face. The verses along with prior context also show exactly what is meant by “judging.” Two errors are considered: The first is to set up rules having no biblical authority, then to condemn others for failing to meet them. The second is to condemn others with the intent of belittling them (i.e. to set them “*at naught*”) or with the intent of exalting ourselves in comparison. There is obviously no error in admonishing a person if the intent is to prevent them from stumbling or falling, or to elevate them after they have done so. Hence the question of whether we are judging is largely answered by our intent. If the intent is to elevate ourselves relative to others, or to lower others relative to ourselves, then we are judging. If the intent is to elevate others, or to prevent them from falling, then we are not judging. In that case we are helping.

The text is also built on the idea that all of us will be answerable to God under a *common* standard. We should be deterred from judging others by the fact that we will all be answerable to God for the *same* things. This can also be seen in the fact that the unifying rule of the Law is that we should treat others as we wish to be treated. It would follow then that what we consider to be a stumbling-block to ourselves should also be considered a stumbling-block to others. Modern emphasis of individuality has sometimes been perverted into the idea of self-defined morality. This cannot be true because the Bible says, “*we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.*” In the final analysis, only the standard of Christ will matter.

Another presumed principle of modern morality is that a person does no wrong provided that his actions do no physical or emotional harm to others. The idea is that what a man does with his personal life is strictly his own business and none should presume to tell him otherwise. Stated differently, the new doctrine says there is no such thing as *personal* sins. There are only interpersonal or social sins. But the verses above contradict this because they imply that physical and emotional harm are not the only harm we can do. We can also do *moral* harm. This happens when we set a stumbling-block before our brother that will cause him to fare worse in judgment before God. In that case, we have acted wrongfully toward him even though we have done nothing to harm him physically or emotionally.

Modern thinking is correct in its emphasis on social responsibility, but incorrect in neglecting the concept of moral harm. Such thinking is inconsistent because moral harm will eventually lead to physical and emotional harm and must therefore be judged as wrong even by modernistic standards. This fact can be seen in the questions: What if all people lived as I live or did as I am doing? What would happen if all people were slothful on the job as I am slothful on my job? What if all people cheated on their taxes as I cheat on my taxes? What if all people had children out of wedlock and financed them with federal aid? What if all people aborted their children? What if all people considered themselves too busy to help others in need? What if my poor behavior in these respects were to influence all others to the same effects? Clearly, our actions would then lead to physical or emotional harm. Such questions divulge the true potency of moral harm.

These are very relevant questions because the facts of experience plainly show that humans are very social creatures. We as a society tend to lose together or win together, fall together or rise together, sin together or repent together, languish together in doubt or revive together in optimism, descend together in apathy and lethargy or ascend together in conviction and commitment. If we see our brother stumble, this is good indication that we are next in line. If we see him rising, then our own prospects become brighter. The forces of sociology have undeniable strength, and it is very unwise to take them lightly.

Being a society that loves sports, we ought to appreciate these principles all the more. Any championship team that forgets them will be damned to defeat, and no number of trophies on the shelf

can save it. The same is true of any other body of people, whether it be a family, church, workplace or nation. *“Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.”*

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