

**#203 “Stumbling Blocks”**  
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Matthew 18:5-6 says, “And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” In Matthew 18, the disciples asked Jesus who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. His answer was to call a child to Himself and emphasize that those who humbled themselves as children were those who would enter heaven and be great. Furthermore, emphasizing His love and care for children, our Lord said that those who receive a child in His name receive Him. In other words, in caring for and protecting the innocent, the weak, the unlearned, the vulnerable, and the needy, we prove our love for the Lord. Part and parcel to being a Christian is looking out for the innocent and naive, doing all that we can to keep others from stumbling.

Christ has one of the most damning statements prepared for those who take advantage of the weak and innocent and lead them astray or into harm’s way. He says that it would be better for them to have millstones hung around their necks and be drowned in the sea rather than be guilty of leading innocent and weak ones astray. Leading others astray when it is in one’s power to do otherwise is beyond despicable before God. It is so contrary to His will, nature, and love to exploit or take advantage of someone in need. According to this passage, it would be better for the person to be drowned in the sea than to be given the chance to cause a vulnerable person to stumble. Of course, Christ is not saying to go out and kill everyone who might be capable of leading an innocent one astray, for the fact remains that any and all persons are capable of such evil. Even believers can err and teach wrong doctrine that can lead an eager and willing learner astray. May God help us all rightly divide His Word so that we edify and do not deceive unwittingly! We should read these words of our Lord and be moved in compassion and care for those who need our help, instruction, and protection. We should be motivated to teach, to love, and to serve. We should be ready to look after the needs of the less fortunate, and, most of all, we should take heed that we accurately teach and preach the Word of God. God’s desire is that we take sin and error with great seriousness and sobriety. We cannot dare become wishy-washy in our thinking or teaching, for as we ourselves compromise and are led astray, we are vulnerable to leading the vulnerable astray along with us. This is most certainly not the place in which we want to find ourselves.

Verse 7 sums up Christ’s message by saying, “Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!” The exclamation points are there for a reason. This is something Christ wants us to seriously think about. Unbelievers lead many astray, and they will be held accountable. But as believers, how dare we lump ourselves in with those who either purposefully or inadvertently do things, say things, or give our approval of things that could lead the weak, the innocent, the naïve, or even our very children astray. The words “woe,” “millstone,” “drowned,” and “eternal fire” (v. 8) should catch

our attention. This is not to say that just because a good Christian person makes a mistake and causes somebody else to sin that he or she will end up in hell. Even Christians stumble and make mistakes (James 3:2). The message for unbelievers, however, should be more than clear. The relevance of this passage for believers, in addition to taking sin seriously in our lives, is to be wary that we don't do or say things that could lead others astray, particularly those who might not be as mature or discerning. As Romans 14:13 says, "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this--not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way."

Too often, Christian leaders give their commendation, approval, or endorsement of a person or a person's work without offering a disclaimer or a word of caution. Pastors and church leaders risk being guilty of leading others astray if they assume that everybody in their congregation can differentiate between truth and error to the same extent that they can. For example, listing a book that contains false teaching on a recommended reading list is dangerous, especially if no word of caution is given. We can be guilty of leading others astray by who we rub shoulders with, by who we take the podium with, and by who we quote. We need to let truth stand above all other associations for the sake of the weak, for the sake of the innocent, and for the sake of the vulnerable. If we do not, perhaps we are unwittingly those who are really weak, having already been stumbled and deceived.

Being responsible for somebody else's downfall is not something we want to have weigh on our conscience. If we have said or done wrong things that led somebody else astray, we should do all that we can to set the record straight. It is imperative that we adopt Jesus' intensity in exercising extreme caution that we do not put stumbling blocks before others. Unless we know what we are saying and doing is of the Lord, we may well be better off keeping our mouths shut, our keyboards silent, and our lives out of the public eye. When we are sure that we are ready to be those who speak the truth and live it out, let us do it with boldness, courage, and perseverance. We can stand in the gap for the weak and for the innocent, and we can knock stumbling blocks out of their paths.