

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Occasions of Stumbling

Those of us who are a little bit clumsy will understand perfectly why it is that we have stumbled or fallen. Someone else always causes it. They leave things lying about in all the wrong places! Living-room tables are the most notorious culprits. Whoever first thought of them was probably a mean and hateful person. I seem to trip over them most often when I am not wearing shoes. Thus, I not only trip and fall, but am left with a bruised and wounded foot for several days. I also have a terrible problem with doorways. Most door openings are built for people with slender shoulders. Those of us who are wider of girth, especially if we are also clumsy, can have an awful time with them. As I write this article, I have a big bruise and a very sore shoulder because I caught the edge of the doorjamb going from one room to another in my home. The world is filled with occasions of stumbling to those of us who are awkward or (more politely) “ungraceful.” Under the law one can be sued in court and found liable for damages for leaving an obstacle that others could stumble over on his property. This is one of the reasons that we have homeowners insurance, i.e., to protect against such lawsuits, and to pay the liability if we are deemed responsible. We must also be aware that we are responsible for the obstacles we may place in the path of others spiritually. Jesus taught that we may be held accountable for the impediments which we, knowingly or unknowingly, put before others: “Woe unto the world because of occasions of stumbling! for it must needs be that the occasions come; but woe to that man through whom the occasion cometh!” (Matt. 18:7). As the Lord spoke of children, he addressed the issue of spiritual culpability with these words: “And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me: But whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:5-6). Each of us needs to be apprised of several important truths which are vividly brought out in these important texts:

1. The World Is Filled With Occasions of Stumbling. A person who is clumsy does not have to look very far to find something to stumble over. Neither does a child who is learning to walk. He will even trip over the carpet itself out in the middle of an otherwise

empty floor space. More than once, though, I have seen an older brother or sister topple the little one who is getting all of the parent's attention. Usually, attention is only one of the things they received from the incident, and not of the kind they counted on! "Woe unto the world because of occasions of stumbling! for it must needs be that the occasions come." "It is a minefield out there!" the Lord says. None of us who have tried for several years to live the life of a Christian would ever tell a new convert anything different from this. An immature Christian must be aware that occasions of stumbling come in many forms: false doctrines, loose morals, older Christians who are weak or indifferent, pressure from people of the world to conform to their lifestyles and attitudes, etc. If we are aware that the world is like this, then we may prepare more fully, and keep our eyes open for those occasions.

2. The World Is Cursed For Such Occasions of Stumbling. "Woe unto the world because of occasions of stumbling!" and, "But whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea." The world in general, most of it certainly, is headed down the road that leads to perdition (Matt. 7:13-14). The question for the Christian is whether we want to go down that road. If we do, then we know it will take us to the same place that it is taking the rest of the world. The road from Nashville to Memphis winds up in Memphis. It's that simple. There are no exceptions. Each of us has others who are depending upon us for help and support, spiritually speaking. If we fail to provide the wholesome spiritual advice, the love and encouragement — and most important of all — the illustration of what a Christian ought to be and do, then we will have become an "occasion of stumbling" which will provide them with just the excuse they may be looking for to quit trying.

3. Occasions of Stumbling Are A Necessary Part of the Human Dilemma and the Divine Plan. "It must needs be that the occasions come ..." said the Savior. They have been around since Eve handed the forbidden fruit to her husband, he tried it also, and they both fell into sin. They will be here so long as the world stands. Such tests fulfill an important part in God's strategy for his world, since they prove the mettle of a man, whether he will stand up under trial: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love him" (Jas. 1:12).

4. Woe To The Man Through Whom Occasions of Stumbling Come. Even though they are an essential part of the world as it is presently constructed, and it suits the plan of God for there to be obstacles to righteousness and faithfulness, nevertheless the person who acts as an occasion of stumbling to others is not therefore free of responsibility or guilt for what he has done. "Woe to the man ..." said Jesus. The portrait

which the Lord paints in the mind's eye is not a pretty one: "It is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea" (v. 6). It would be a ghastly and macabre thing to be thrown into the depths with a heavy weight tied to the neck! The Lord said "it would be better ..." (NIV) than being a stumbling-block to others! Let us be ever mindful of our example before others. Let us never provide an "occasion of stumbling" which may lead to another's fall from grace and loss of heaven, for in the process we may well lose out on heaven ourselves.

- Daniel H. King Sr., via Truth Magazine, January 15, 1998

Faithfulness is Required

"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10). In these two passages the apostles and other Christians are referred to as ministers and stewards. In the passage from First Peter the scriptural meaning of the word "minister" is suggested by using it as a verb instead of a noun as in the passage from First Corinthians. A minister is one who ministers. A "good minister" is one who teaches the gospel of Christ faithfully (1 Timothy 4:6). There seems to be a tendency in the church today to use this word as a title in much the same way as the denominations use the word "pastor." Such a use is foreign to the New Testament usage. "Minister" is a descriptive term and not a title.

Likewise, the word "steward" is a descriptive term for the work that each Christian is to do and not a title of office. Its basic meaning is the manager of a household or of household affairs (Thayer's Greek Lexicon, p.441). The Lord has given the gospel of Christ to earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). So we who are Christians are ministers and "stewards of the mysteries of God." God does His work of spreading the gospel here on earth through us. If His work is not done it is our fault, for God "hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3).

Since Christians have such a great responsibility it is not surprising that God would require that each of them be found faithful. Faithfulness is as much a command of God as baptism is. Without faithfulness baptism is to no avail. If we expect a home in Heaven we must be faithful to God. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). "Who then is that faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made the ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods" (Matthew 24:45-47).

Our faithfulness cannot be determined by our piety nor by what others are doing. Neither can we set our own standard of what faithfulness is nor use a standard set by another person or group of people. Our faithfulness must be determined by God's standard as indicated in the following: "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by (against in the Revised Version) myself; yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Corinthians 4:3-4). Notice that these are the verses following the ones at the beginning of this article. That makes it clear that Paul was referring to judging our faithfulness.

God is the only competent judge of faithfulness. He has revealed His judgment in the pages of the New Testament. How does your life compare with the judgment of God? Are you faithful? Remember that this is not arbitrary but it is a command of God.

- Elam B. Kuykendall, 1974

- > "A pessimist is someone who complains about the noise when opportunity knocks!"
 - > "Courage is fear that has spent time in prayer!"
 - > "You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving!"
 - > "If your Christianity seems to be a real drag, it may be because you are dragging too many worldly weights!"
 - > "Freedom does not give us the right to do as we please, but the liberty to do as we ought!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"A Man's Spiritual Growth!"* (Text: 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18); Sunday evening: Class: Hebrews 12:1-13, page 131.