

“Protecting Purity in the Church”

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Saving Grace Bible Church

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Morning Worship Service

Text

“And He said to His disciples, “It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but woe to him through whom they come!² “It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble.³ “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.⁴ “And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” (Luke 17:1-4 NAS)

Textual Proposition

We protect purity by making sure we do not act in a way that causes others to stumble, by confronting others when they sin, and by forgiving others of their sin

Sermonic Proposition

To protect purity in the church we seek to walk carefully, confront sin, and forgive sinners

Introduction

My intention was to get further in this study but with communion service and what needs to be covered I had to split this message in two. This morning we are going to look simply at what this passage teaches. Next week we will see what this passage teaches about how we forgive

All of us have heard of the person who has said, “I do not go to Church because there are hypocrites there.”

- One Pastor replied back “There is room for more”

If you have been a part of the Church for any amount of time, you have faced sin in the Church

- People may have sinned against you
- You may have sinned against someone else

Churches split

- Fights start over carpet color or pew placement
- Everyone has seen Baptist Church, 1st Baptist Church, and even 2nd Baptist Church in one town

Jesus words here are weighty

“It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but woe to him through whom they come!”

- We will face conflict in the Church
- People will not like what we teach
- Some people will not like how we lead
- They will feel entitled to believe that because they have been a part of the Church for so long that they are entitled to speak evil about the leadership or teaching of the Church
- They will think that because they are a founding member they do not have to be gracious, merciful, loving or patient. Somehow character passages do not apply to them when they don't like something someone else is teaching or doing
- Young people are clueless and reckless and speak their mind. Older people don't care anymore and just let people have their thoughts unfiltered
 - Woe to the church through many stumbling blocks come
- Some people will operate in such a way that allows them to be above the Bible and those they are against as being under the Bible
 - Woe to the Church and its stumbling blocks

Stumbling blocks will come in the ministry

<http://thomrainer.com/2015/11/twenty-five-silly-things-church-members-fight-over/>

These are actual fights in the Church. Yes, friends you cannot make this stuff up

- Argument over the appropriate length of the worship pastor's beard (*no more than 1.5 inches longer than the pastor's beard.*)
- Fight over whether or not to build a children's playground or to use the land for a cemetery (*I'm dying to know the resolution of this one.*)
- A church dispute of whether or not to install restroom stall dividers in the women's restroom (*I'm calling unfair on this one. The men should have their stall dividers too.*)
- A church argument and vote to decide if a clock in the worship center should be removed (*I think this one is a timely argument.*)
- A 45-minute heated argument over the type of filing cabinet to purchase: black or brown; 2, 3, or 4 drawers
- A fight over which picture of Jesus to put in the foyer (*I just want to know who took the pictures.*)
- A petition to have all church staff clean shaven (*No church planters are allowed.*)
- A dispute over whether the worship leader should have his shoes on during the service (*I vote for shoes, shirts, and pants.*)
- A big church argument over the discovery that the church budget was off \$0.10. Someone finally gave a dime to settle the issue
- A dispute in the church because the Lord's Supper had cran/grape juice instead of grape juice
- Arguments over what type of green beans the church should serve (*ahh: none.*)
- An argument on whether the church should allow deviled eggs at the church meal (*Only if it's balanced with angel food cake for dessert*)
- An argument over who has the authority to buy postage stamps for the church (*The members were licking their wounds over this issue.*)

- A disagreement over using the term “potluck” instead of “pot blessing”
- A church member was chastised because she brought vanilla syrup to the coffee server. It looked too much like liquor
- An argument in church over who has access to the copy machine
- Some church members left the church because one church member hid the vacuum cleaner from them. It resulted in a major fight and split
- An argument over whether to have gluten-free communion bread or not
- A fight over whether or not to sing “Happy Birthday”
- An argument over whether the fake, dusty plants should be removed from the podium

Sadly these are real sources of conflict in the Church

- Oh how stumbling blocks are going to come in life and the ministry of the Church
- Woe to the Church or person who is not careful to protect themselves and the Church

We have had people join our church because our Church meetings were peaceful. Oh I cannot imagine what happens out there

This section of scripture teaches us how to keep the Church from stumbling blocks

- We need to watch ourselves
- We need to rebuke sin
- We need to forgive sin

In this section of scripture, we are warned about the dangers of stumbling blocks. We are taught how to remove them and how to keep them away

In this text we learn how to keep the Church pure by:

1. Heeding the Warning against Stumbling Blocks
2. Removing Stumbling Blocks
3. Keeping Stumbling Blocks Away with Forgiveness

1. Heeding the Warning against Stumbling Blocks

“And He said to His disciples, “It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but woe to him through whom they come!² “It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble.”
(Luke 17:1-2 NAS)

This is an important warning for all of us

- We live today where people act first and think of the consequences of their actions second
- People prize their individuality and care little about the effect of their actions upon others

We prize acting the way we want. Saying what we want when we want to say it. And there is very little patience for anyone who does not let us "enjoy the moment."

- There are people protesting everything and they do not care who they hurt or how they sin against others

People angry at the world go shoot up schools and malls

People angry at life run cars into crowds

People, feeling entitled by their anger, act out all kinds of atrocities

- These acts leave people suffering the physical and psychological wounds which scar their life

1st Jesus says these are inevitable

- We need to be prepared for them
- We need to understand that these are part of life

We don't know how to handle death and calamity very well

- Let's be honest, it is hard
- It is hard to suffer
- It is hard to feel grief

We cannot avoid difficulty in life but we do our best trying

- Many glamorize death
- We try to protect people from harm

And if we are honest, and look at life carefully, God protects us, by His mercy, from a lot of suffering

- We are cared for in so many ways by God's goodness
- So we don't expect that difficulties will come

But Christ says stumbling blocks are inevitable

- This is because man is not basically good
- Man is fallen

"As it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one;¹¹ There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God;¹² All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one." ¹³ "Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving," "The poison of asps is under their lips"; ¹⁴ "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness"; ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood, ¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their paths, ¹⁷ And the path of peace have they not known." ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:10-18 NAS)

But we also live in a world system corrupted by evil

- Eph 2:1-3

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” (Ephesians 2:1-3 NAS)

We have the unholy trinity working against us

- The World
- The Flesh
- The Devil

As Peter says

“Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8 NAS)

- Peter knows from firsthand experience a tango with el diablo is a difficult dance

The Devil, the World, and the flesh leave us with circumstances which can easily create difficulties and stumbling blocks. They will come. They are inevitable

The Church is not immune to these difficulties

- Even when we know our hearts are tempted by evil and even when we know we have a worldly system fighting against the Church, and even when the devil comes against us we are unprepared for resisting evil
- This is why Jesus’s warning here is so important
- The presence of stumbling blocks is inevitable

The warning from Christ is, “let it not be through us.”

- Let each of us guard our hearts and conduct so that others do not stumble because of us

Let Churches work harder at picking the right spiritual leaders and caring for them so that the work of the ministry is not a cause of stumbling blocks

Let young couples take more time to develop character and invest themselves in the right marital partner so that there are no stumbling blocks

Let parents spend more time investing in their children and caring for their work at home so that there are no stumbling blocks

Let Church leaders watch over their lives with diligence and let them invest themselves in the ministry of the Church to protect it from being a stumbling block

Here is the reason why:

"It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble." (Luke 17:2 NAS)

- *We would be better off dead than to cause someone else to stumble into sin*
 - *You ever think this way in guarding others?*
- This is not a prescription to go take your life if you make someone sin
- He is not saying you better kill yourself before you make someone sin
- No, this is a point to show us how serious sin is. We should consider our actions very carefully for it would be better that we were dead than to make someone stumble into sin.
- He is getting our attention to say be careful how you act so that you do not cause others to stumble

This is a serious warning for us which should sober us as we conduct ourselves in this world

This leads us to our second point

2. The Church is purified by removing stumbling blocks

"Be on your guard! **If your brother sins, rebuke him**; and if he repents, forgive him

First, and primarily, this passage teaches about dealing with sin in the Church. It needs to be confronted

- We have to remove stumbling blocks and we do it by confrontation
- Some have said that it is unloving to rebuke people
- They question it like it is evil
- They will say things like:

"We accept sinners here."

- Who does not accept sinners at Church? Give me a break, the only church that does not accept sinners is the one that is closed
- Say what you really mean, you tolerate sinners sin there
- All of us come to the Church as sinners
- It is like saying, we accept people

"it is unloving to confront sin."

- It is unloving to love the things of this world
- It is unloving to let someone cause another to stumble

“Don’t Judge others”

- The standard you use, it will be used
- It is not judging to uphold God’s standard because we are all going to face it anyway

Here the scriptures are clear, if your brother sins, rebuke him

- If someone, who claims to know Christ, is caught in sin we are to confront him

The word rebuke here means to warn him

- We are to tell them of the dangers of their actions
- We are to call them to repentance and faith
- We are to point out the error of their ways

We rebuke sin, or warn against sin because that is obedience

- The godly call the righteous to faith

Matt 20:31

“And the multitude **sternly told** them to be quiet; but they cried out all the more, saying, ‘Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!’” (Matthew 20:31 NAS)

“Preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, **rebuke**, exhort, with great patience and instruction.” (2 Timothy 4:2 NAS)

“But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, “The Lord **rebuke** you.” (Jude 1:9 NAS)

It is also used in Matt 16 with Peter rebuking or warning Christ

Why is it important to rebuke?

- Because it reminds people that they should walk carefully
- It is an act of mercy and grace which tells people that God is Holy and will hold everyone accountable

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:10 NAS)

“For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds.” (Matthew 16:27 NAS)

“On the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.”
(Romans 2:16 NAS)

- To rebuke someone who is in sin is to keep them from causing others to stumble
- To rebuke them is to remind them of the coming judgment of God and cause them to think carefully about their sinful choices
- By rebuking we are removing stumbling blocks so that we help God’s people live holy lives
 - Have you ever noticed how trouble always finds those who are flirting with small sins in their lives?

The church finds greater spiritual strength when it encourages others to godliness and it removes ungodliness from its midst

“My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back,²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.” (James 5:19-20 NAS)

- James reminds us of the value of confronting sin. We slow it down. We stop it from happening. We save people’s soul from condemnation

The Church which seeks purity, seeks to confront sin and remove stumbling blocks. This leads us to the final step to help protect purity:

3. Keep Stumbling Blocks away

"Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; **and if he repents, forgive him.** (Luke 17:3 NAS)

"And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." (Luke 17:4 NAS)

- We understand stumbling blocks will come
- We understand they need to be confronted

But after they are confronted we need to release them

- The only thing more destructive than the sin itself, is the forgiveness not granted

Relationships fall apart and are destroyed by those who will not release sin

- People who replay hurts over in their minds
- People who keep reliving the hurts and will not let them go
- Like a dog returning to his vomit, so people return to the sin committed against them. They will not forgive

They say things like:

- “Why did you do this to me?”
- “How can you expect me to forgive you when you have hurt me in this way?”
- They can’t sleep at night because they are thinking about the ways they were sinned against

We are commanded here to forgive the sinner

- If he should commit the same sin 7x in one day and he comes back seeking restoration you should forgive him
- We are commanded to regularly forgive sins
- To regularly and continually forgive sins – If 7x in one day, we keep forgiving

One of the greatest struggles in the Church is people who will not forgive

- They harbor sin pretending that not talking about sin is enough while they live out the events in their mind
 - They replay the events
 - They relive the hurts in their minds
 - They reimagine the scenario saying what they want to the sinner
 - They imagine ways the sinner would be hurt or removed for their sin
 - They keep reliving the sin privately in their heart

As they do this they do not love their brother or sister but keep the sin alive

- They pull away to live in the misery of their hurt rather than draw closer to each other

Purity in the Church is hurt because forgiveness is withheld

How does withholding forgiveness create stumbling blocks for the Church?

- It keeps bitterness alive
- It causes people to pick sides – destroys unity
- It keeps people from showing love to each other
- It keeps people hopeless as they are always stuck in past events and unable to move forward and grow in Christ
 - It keeps people caged in the memory of the past
- If the debt is not released, that is if it is not forgiven, then it is impossible to be repaid. This leaves the Church in a hopeless situation of trying to repay a debt which is impossible to repay

But it also makes the church disobedient since they are not obeying Christ’s commands here and thus it removes God’s spiritual blessing and protection from His people

If we ignore His word then we place ourselves outside of the protection and grace of God

Conclusion

Now I have taught you what the passage teaches. But this is not how others have used this passage. Some have come to this passage and said this:

Forgiveness is to happen in the exact same way that God forgave us. So we forgive how God forgives us. We were not forgiven until we asked for forgiveness and we repented. Upon these conditions we were forgiven. Proof is this verse:

"Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him." (Luke 17:3 NAS)

- If our brother sins – rebuke him
- If he repents – forgive him

So as they say forgiveness is a two way transaction which takes place. First the penitent and repentant sinner confesses his sin. Second the forgiving victim releases the debt. With these conditions met there is forgiveness

- The point they make from Luke 17:3-4 is that this verse teaches us HOW to forgive

What I have demonstrated for you this AM is that this verse teaches us how to protect the purity of the Church. This is the purpose of this text, that is to keep stumbling blocks out of the Church. How do we do that?

1. By taking personal inventory of ourselves to make sure that we are not the cause because we would be better off dead, where we cannot do anything than to be causing others to sin
2. We protect the Church from stumbling by rebuking sin and calling our brother to repentance. We do not let sin live long among God's people
3. We protect the Church from stumbling by forgiving sin. We do not hold on to sin debts but release them. Even if we are sinned against, the same way, multiple times a day

This is the intention of the verse. The intention is not to teach us how forgiveness takes place

Next week we will look at these verses again and see what they teach us about how we forgive

We will seek to understand the conditional forgiveness view and whether the text here supports it