Am I A Stumbling Block or A Stepping Stone?

Philippians 3:15-19 (NKJV)

Please open your Bibles to our scripture text this morning in Philippians the third chapter, and let's read verses 15-19.

Philippians 3:15-19 (NKJV)

15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

16 Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:

19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.

PRAYER

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INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION

The story is told about AN ACTOR who was playing the role of JESUS in a Passion Play out in the Ozarks of Missouri.

As the actor carried the cross up the hill one of the tourist started heckling him. Well finally the actor had all he could take so he threw down the cross and walked over and punched the guy right in the mouth.
After the play was over that night the director pulled the actor aside and said, “Listen, I know that guy in the audience was an obnoxious pest, but you've got to remember you are playing the part of JESUS and JESUS would never punch someone in the mouth.

The next night that same heckler was back and sure enough he started taunting the actor even worse than the night before. Once again, the actor threw down the cross and walked over and punched the guy.

The director came to him after the play that night and said, “That's it.......you're FIRED! I can't have a "Jesus" who beats up people in the audience.”

The remorseful actor begged and pleaded with the director to give him one more chance, assuring him he would keep his temper under control. Reluctantly the director agreed to hire him back.

Well sure enough, the next night the heckler was back and this time he was more obnoxious than ever. The director watched anxiously to see what the actor would do. When he was about to reach his breaking point, the actor walked over to the heckler and said, “I'll deal with you after the resurrection buddy!”

Like that actor, you and I represent Christ in this world. The apostle Paul tells us in II Corinthians 5:20 that we are “ambassadors of Christ.” An ambassador is one who has been given the authority to be a messenger or a representative of another.

This means you and I have an extremely important responsibility to live our lives in such a way as to bring glory and honor to the One who has chosen us to represent Him to the world.

As Christians, you and I are personally responsible for our Christian influence. Each and every one of us is a “model” of Christianity. You are either “a good model” or you are “a bad model.”
You are either a **stepping stone** that leads others to Christ or you are a **stumbling block** that turns others away from Christ.

And the soul-searching question all of us need to ask ourselves this morning is this: **Am I a stumbling block or am I a stepping stone?**

In our text, Paul reveals some characteristics of "stepping stones" and "stumbling blocks."

Let's begin with the stumbling blocks.

I. **Characteristics of a Stumbling Block** (vs. 18, 19)

1. Before we look at these characteristics let me remind you just how serious it is to be "a stumbling block."

   Jesus gives us this stern warning in **Mark 9:42, 43 (NKJV)**

   
   42 "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.

   43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—

2. In Jesus' day there were two kinds of millstones. One was small and would be used by a woman to grind a small amount of grain to make a loaf of bread. The other millstone was very large. In fact it was so large it could only be turned by a donkey or an ox. These large millstones were used to grind large amounts of grain. It is this "large millstone" Jesus had in mind when He issued this stern warning.
3. Do you grasp the seriousness of what Jesus is saying? He is saying it would be better for someone to hang a huge millstone around my neck and drown me in the bottom of the ocean than for me to live my life in such a careless, wreckless way that I would cause someone else to miss heaven. That's a sobering thought isn't it?

4. Well if being "a stumbling block" is that serious, then I need to know what the characteristics of a stumbling block are so I can examine myself to see if I am one don't I?

5. We see three characteristics of "a stumbling block" in verses 18, 19.

(A) First of all, A STUMBLING BLOCK IS "AN ENEMY OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST. (v. 18a)

v.18a For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

It's not the hardened criminals.......or the godless atheists who have moved Paul to tears as he writes these verses, it is the Christians who are not living up to their professed faith in Jesus Christ.

For me to profess to be a Christian and then to live my life in a way that contradicts my profession of faith makes me an enemy of the cross of Christ. It means my poor example is doing more HARM than GOOD. It means my life is turning people away from Christ rather than turning people towards Christ.
For me to talk about LOVE and yet hate my brother or sister-in-Christ, makes me an enemy of the cross.

For me to talk about MORAL LIVING but to live in immorality makes me an enemy of the cross.

For me to PRAISE GOD ON SUNDAY MORNING but “cuss like a sailor” and tell filthy jokes during the week makes me an enemy of the cross.

For me to PREACH ONE THING and practice another, makes me an enemy of the cross.

When our lives are filled with inconsistency and hypocrisy we do more damage than good for the cause of Christ.

A Stumbling Block is “an enemy of the cross of Christ.”

Secondly, A STUMBLING BLOCK IS DRIVEN BY FLESHLY APPETITES. (v.19a)

In verse 19, Paul says “the god” of stumbling block is his belly. “

What Paul is saying is that when someone who professes to be a Christian is more concerned with satisfying the desires of the flesh than they are with spiritual matters they are no different than those who don't even believe in GOD, and therefore they become a stumbling block that turns people away from the LORD.
Paul is NOT saying we should neglect our physical needs, but when our lives are “driven” by our SINFUL cravings, we forfeit our Christian INFLUENCE over those who do not know Christ.

How can our lives possibly have any positive impact on the lives of our non-Christian relatives and friends if our habits and our behavior is no different than theirs’?

Church, is it possible the reason more people aren’t attracted to Christ and His Church is because they don’t see any noticeable difference between the way we live and the way they live?

When we are driven by the same “fleshly appetites” as the world, we become a stumbling block to those who don't know Christ.

A STUMBLING BLOCK IS “AN ENEMY OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST.”
A STUMBLING BLOCK IS DRIVEN BY FLESHLY APPETITES.

(C) And thirdly, A STUMBLING BLOCK IS FOCUSED ON THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD (v. 19b)

Paul says in the latter part of verse 19, “Their minds are set on earthly things.”
To have one’s “mind set on earthly things” means to be so pre-occupied with the world that one neglects the more important **SPIRITUAL** matters.

There's nothing wrong with having nice things, but when I value temporary earthly treasures more than eternal heavenly treasures, I become a stumbling block.

There's nothing wrong with enjoying good, clean recreational activities and hobbies, but when those activities become more important to me than being in the LORD'S house on the LORD'S DAY, I become a stumbling block to others.

**A STUMBLING BLOCK IS AN ENEMY OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST.**
**A STUMBLING BLOCK IS DRIVEN BY FLESHLY APPETITES.**
**A STUMBLING BLOCK IS FOCUSED ON THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD.**

Ask yourself..........”AM I A STUMBLING BLOCK?”
Secondly, let's consider..............

II. The Characteristics Of A STEPPING STONE

(A) First of all, if I am to be a stepping stone I must FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS.

v. 17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

By admonishing the Philippian Christians to “follow his example” Paul is identifying himself as a STEPPING STONE to Christ.

How did Paul become “a stepping stone?” By following “the PATTERN” ..........by following in the FOOTSTEPS of JESUS.

Earlier in Philippians 1:21 Paul said, “For me to live is Christ, to die is gain.”

To live for CHRIST was the whole AIM and PURPOSE of Paul's life. Jesus was his very BREATH. Jesus was the SOUL of Paul's soul........he was the HEART of Paul's heart........he was the LIFE of Paul's life.

If someone were to ask Paul to describe His life in one word, Paul's answer would be JESUS.

Few of us can claim the depth of devotion and commitment to Christ that Paul had, but if you and I will determine to FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS our lives will become A STEPPING STONE for others to come to Christ.
Second, if I am to be a “stepping stone” I MUST FOCUS ON HEAVEN.

Remember in verse 19 Paul told us those who are stumbling blocks “have set their minds on earthly things.”

If you and I are to be “stepping stones” for others to come to Christ, we must shift our focus from earthly things to heavenly things.

v.20 “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the LORD Jesus Christ.”

In his commentary on Philippians, John Walvoord writes:

“The earthly phase of our experience is purely temporary, the goal is to be with the Lord forever. Accordingly, our hope is not simply deliverance from sin in this life or growth in grace or the knowledge of Christ, but our anticipation leaps forward to that day when we will see our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

A little girl who was taking an evening walk with her father. She looked up at the starry sky and said? “Oh, Daddy, if the wrong side of heaven is so beautiful, what must the right side be!” (Charles L. Allen in Home Fires)

Brothers and sisters, if you and I are to be “stepping stones” to lead others to Christ, we must focus on our eternal destination and not be distracted by the allure of this temporary world.

In the article Bob Russell noted that when General Douglas MacArthur led the U.S. Military Forces in Japan following the end of World War II, he believed the best antidote to communism and the establishment of a lasting democratic government was for the American Churches to send missionaries to Japan and convert the Japanese people to Christ.

Many American missionaries answered the call, and went to Japan to preach the gospel to the Japanese people. While the initial response to the gospel was very favorable, in time the missionaries began to notice a strong resentment from the Japanese people.

The reason? Many of the Japanese people saw American soldiers who professed to be Christians, co-horting with prostitutes, and turning Japanese women into “sex slaves.” They saw many of our soldiers engaged in drunkenness and bar-room brawls. Many of our soldiers became a “stumbling block” to the Japanese people and totally turned them off to Christianity. As a result a wonderful evangelistic opportunity was lost.

Brothers and sisters, don't think for one minute that how you and I conduct ourselves outside these four walls doesn't matter. Because we profess to be Christians, our lives are being closely watched and scrutinized by the lost world around us.

Does your life point people to Christ or turn people away from Christ?

Are you a “stepping stone” or are you a “stumbling block?”