

Stumbling Blocks

“Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.” Luke 17:3-4.

Jesus is here warning His disciples of stumbling blocks that come through people. Jesus's warning is so severe that he pronounces woes on those through whom stumbling blocks come in verse 1. In the prophets, woes were a pronouncement of the judgment of God. To have a woe cast on a person is to say that one has the judgment of God on their head, which is the most severe thing one can have waiting for them when they die. In fact, the woe that is pronounced on those through whom stumbling blocks come is so severe that Jesus says in verse 2: *“It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.”* Interestingly, in the same breath that Jesus pronounces woes on those who cause others to sin, He then warns them to rebuke those who sin and to forgive those who repent. He bridges the woe and the commendation with the words *Pay attention to yourselves!* Why would Jesus warn His disciples of the judgment of God on those who cause others to sin, tell His disciples to watch themselves, and then tell them to forgive others?

One thought is that, by not rebuking or forgiving, disciples can become stumbling blocks themselves. If someone sins and the disciple does not rebuke them, then it may appear that the disciple is condoning the sin, which means the person sinning will have no reason to stop and the disciple has practiced cowardice rather than love. Thus, through the disciple, the person continues in sin and the disciple may sin as well. On the other hand, if someone sins and the disciple does not forgive them, then the person who sinned may continue in their sin, or may not believe that God forgives them, and the disciple has allowed an opportunity for a root of bitterness to spring up. By not rebuking and not forgiving, disciples may become stumbling blocks to both Christians and non-Christians.

Disciples are to keep an eye out for stumbling blocks that cause sin. If we see them ahead, let us have the courage to rebuke and to forgive those through whom they come. Let us also watch ourselves so that no stumbling blocks come through us. **[DJR]**