

The Danger of Causing a Christian to Sin

Scripture: Matthew 18:5-9

Code: 2328

Let's open our Bibles together and look at Matthew chapter 18...As we remember from last Lord's Day, this entire chapter is a discourse on the childlikeness of the believer, and a tremendously helpful chapter. We have much richness in store for us before we're finished with this great chapter.

For this morning, we're gonna be looking at verses 5 through 9. The second segment in our Lord's discussion of the childlikeness of the believer, and I would think that the Lord, if He were to title the section, would title it "The Danger of Causing a Christian to Sin." "The Danger of Causing a Christian to Sin."

As most of you know, I am the father of four children, very precious children. I wouldn't trade them for any that I've met. I guess that's a father's perspective. I love them. I am zealous for their spiritual growth, for their continued movement ahead to be like Jesus Christ. I am committed to care for them, to protect them from harm and from danger. I feel a tremendous sense of responsibility for them. From time to time in their lives, someone comes along who may lead them away from the things that I believe. When they were little, playmates might want them to go play in the street or go someplace that they knew they were not to go, where there might be harm or danger. When they got into school, their schoolmates might pressure them to certain attitudes and certain actions and certain words of vocabulary and certain functions that we really didn't want them to be involved in; and there was a certain amount of pressure coming from others to pull them into those things; and then, of course, the world in general just tries to force them into its evil mold by its overpowering influence.

And as a father, I've always tried to fight those things. I've always tried, sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing, to contribute to my children's welfare physically and spiritually; and I can just tell you this as a certain basic relational feature. If you wanna be in good with me, then join me in the care of my children; and if you wanna be in bad with me, then influence my children to do things that I don't want them to do or to believe things I don't want them to believe or to behave in ways that I don't want them to behave. In other words, how you treat my children is gonna affect your relationship to me. If you contribute to the welfare of my children by spiritual influence, by lifting them up, by teaching them the things of God, by encouraging them to obey their parents, then you and I are gonna get along fine; but if you influence my children for evil, then we have a problem.

I think any of us as parents can identify with that. You can remember times in the raising of your children when another child influenced them to evil, and it grieved your heart and made it very difficult

for you to hold that other child with any kind of balanced perspective. Some of you have experienced, you had a daughter and perhaps a young man came along and made her pregnant and drop...brought great pain and anxiety to your heart. Perhaps you've had a young person, and someone has sold them drugs or led them into some kind of illegal activity, and it goes on and on. Or maybe you send your child off to college, and...and his mind was stolen by some who wanted to take away the truth of God and replace it with the emptiness of man.

I was reading yesterday a book called *The Lord of the Second Advent*, the story of Steve Kemperman who went away to college, his father being a fine Ph.D. in mathematics, sent his son to college to prepare him to be a...a full, well-rounded young man, and the Moonies got him and turned him into a...a cultist; and it tells the story of how he was rescued by the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We've all had experiences like that where we desire to protect our children; and we worry about the influences of the world; and...and we know that if you wanna be on the side of the parent, you wanna accompany the parent in his effort to make his child all that he wants him to be.

Well, if we as human beings feel that way, then you can imagine how God feels; and you can imagine how great it is a concern of the heart of God that His children be well cared for, that his children be respected and protected and nurtured in the direction of His holy will for them. I suppose we would assume, too, that, for Christians, we would be very careful how we treated other Christians, knowing they are the children of God.

In 1 John 5:1, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone that loves Him that begot, loveth Him also that is begotten of Him." In other words, if you really love the Lord, you certainly would love His children; and if you sought the glory of the Lord, you would certainly seek the welfare of His children, wouldn't you? I mean it just seems obvious. I mean if you were a Christian, you wouldn't seek to undermine the spiritual life of another Christian, would you? Well, certainly not when you think about it that way.

And, yet, in Matthew chapter 18, a most interesting thing is going on. The disciples, children of God, who belong to Jesus Christ, are provoking one another to sin...by arguing and hassling and debating about who is the greatest in the Kingdom, they are provoking each other to bitterness, to rivalry, to ambition, to pride, to envy, to jealousy, to self-seeking. In other words, they are mutually causing each other to sin; and our Lord takes on this matter by instructing them as to the importance of not causing one another to sin.

Now, how you treat God's people has always been of great concern to God. Go back with me for a moment to the 105th Psalm. The 105th Psalm, and here we find a reiteration of God's relationship to His people Israel...In verse 5, "Remember His marvelous works...says the psalmist...that He hath done, His wonders and the judgments of His mouth." He was doing, in great measure, what Drew exhorted us to do in the song -- to remember the wonders of God; and they were there called by that

by Psalm to remember all that God had done for them, particularly His faithfulness to His covenant. "O ye seed of Abraham, His servant, ye children of Jacob, His chosen. He is the Lord our God; His judgments are in all the earth. He hath remembered His covenant for ever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations, which covenant He made with Abraham, and His oath unto Isaac, and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel or Joseph for an everlasting covenant."

And so it's a reminder of God as the covenant-keeping God, the faithful God; and he says in verse 12 that God remembered the covenant, even "when there were but a few men in number, yea, very few and sojourners. When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people." In other words, God remembered the covenant, not only in the times they were in the land, but in the times they were scattered, and the times they were...they were drifters, and the times they were sojourners, God was still faithful.

And verse 14 is what I want you to note, particularly. "He permitted no man to do them wrong; yea, He reproveth kings for their sakes, saying, 'Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm.'" Now, the psalmist is saying that God has always been zealous for the protection of His people. He's always been concerned that His people be cared for, and that anyone who wounds His people, anyone who brings either physical or spiritual harm against His people, is touching God's anointed; and that brings God into the picture in terms of a holy reaction.

This all started in Genesis chapter 12; and when God first set out to call a nation from the loins of Abraham, God said this. "I will bless them that bless thee and curse him that curseth thee." In other words, from the very beginning, how one treats God's children is a determiner as to the blessing or the cursing of God on that life. How you treat God's people is a determiner of blessing or of cursing.

In the 27th chapter of Genesis in the 29th verse, a reiteration of the same word comes. It says, "Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed he that blesseth thee." And, again, how we treat God's people is a determiner of blessing or cursing. God has always desired the positive influence on His people. When God laid out the law by which Israel was to live, He wanted that law not only to be held up so that each man could be holy, but so that each man would not be causing other men to sin. Not only are we, as they were, responsible for our own sinfulness, but for the sinfulness of those around us.

That's why, in Deuteronomy 24:4, it says, "Thou shalt not cause the land to sin." Not only are you not to sin, but you are not to cause someone to sin; and that very important passage is in reference to an illegitimate divorce. When you put away your wife without grounds, you make her an adulteress. You make whoever marries her an adulterer. You become an adulterer when you remarry, and you make an adulteress out of the woman you marry. So don't do that. Don't put away your wife without cause. In other words, God is very, very concerned that we not cause His people to sin.

Now, that becomes the issue in Matthew 18; and we'll look again at that passage. Jesus brings up this whole matter of our responsibility in regard to each other. Most people, and I...I suppose we could say this hoping that it were true, most people who call themselves Christians have some concern for their own holiness. Most people who really are Christians certainly are concerned about their own purity of life. But I wonder if we really ever stop to think about the purity of the lives of other people. Maybe we're sort of content if we can just take care of ourselves, and we don't worry about how we affect anyone else. That's quite contrary to what God is saying and what Christ is teaching in this passage. We must not only do no evil in our own lives, but we must never cause another Christian to sin. That is the specific message of this passage.

Now, let's look at three key words: the principle, the peril, and the prevention. Verse 5 is the principle. It's a very simple passage, very straightforward, and very convicting. I want you to know in my own heart that I have battled through these principles now for about two weeks, and I trust and pray that the Lord is using them to refine my own life as I trust He will in yours.

The principle comes in verse 5, and this sets everything up. "And whosoever shall receive one such little child in My name, receiveth Me." It is impossible, says that verse, to separate God from His people. It is impossible to separate the Lord from His people. The prophet said, "He that toucheth Israel... toucheth the apple of my eye." Now, that isn't an...the apple of his eye isn't out here, some apple, the best-looking apple in the bunch. That was the Hebrew way of saying the pupil of the eye. God says, "When you touch Israel, you jam your finger in My eye, and that irritates Me." You're taking a poke at God's eye, the most vulnerable part...part of the exposed anatomy. That's the most sensitive thing to be wounded or injured. You are poking God in the most sensitive area when you touch His people. That's a basic principle. Why?

Because when you receive His people, verse 5, you're receiving Him. The implication is He's bound up with His people as one. Now, this is a favorite teaching of the Lord -- the concept of the believer's unity to Him is really, in many ways, the heart and soul of Christianity. We're not people who believe in a system. We're people who are united with God, aren't we? We are one with Jesus Christ. We don't just follow His teachings. We're one with Him, and the Lord taught using this principle again and again, one of His very favorite truths.

In Matthew 10:40, we saw that He said He, "Receiveth you, you receiveth Me. He that receiveth Me, receiveth Him that sent Me." We find also in the Gospel of Luke another indication of this same principle taught by our Lord in verse 16 of Luke 10. "He that heareth you heareth Me. He that despiseth you despiseth Me. He that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me." We find it also in John's Gospel in several places, really. Just to call to your attention the more familiar ones, John 13:20, "Verily, verily I say unto you, he that receiveth whomsoever I send, receiveth Me. He that receiveth Me, receiveth Him that sent Me." John 14:20, "And the day you shall know that I am in My

Father, and He in Me, and I in you." We find also in the 9th chapter of Acts where the Apostle Paul is indicted on the Damascus road and dropped to his knees before the Lord Jesus Christ; and Jesus says, "Paul...or Saul...why persecutest thou Me?" In other words, though Saul was killing Christians and persecuting Christians, the Lord says, "You're doing it to Me." It's very familiar Biblical truth that God's life is bound up with His people; and when you touch His people, you're touching Him. Very important foundational principle.

And we could dive deeply into this truth. It is literally all over the New Testament. First John chapter 2 verse 24, it says, "Let that therefore abide in you which you have heard from the beginning. If that which you've heard from the beginning shall remain in you, you shall also continue in the Son and in the Father." First John 3:24, it says, "And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in Him, and by this we know that He abides in us by the Spirit whom He's given us." Chapter 4 verse 13, "By this we know that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He's given us the Spirit." That's just 1 John, and you can find it in the letters of Paul and everywhere. Peter and James. You find this idea that we're in Christ, and we're indivisibly linked with the very person who is our Lord and Savior.

He is the vine. We are the branches. He is the body. He is the head, rather. We are the body. He is the foundation. We are the building. He is the husband. We are the wife, and so it goes. In fact, when Paul wants to speak against sexual evil and bring the strongest argument to bear in 1 Corinthians 6, he says that, "When you join yourself to a harlot, you become one flesh with that harlot." And then in the next verse he says, "And he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." So you are one in the Lord, and if you join yourself to a harlot, you're joining Christ to a harlot. In other words, you can't separate yourself from Christ. You are in Him, and if you drag Him into harlotry, you have defiled yourself a very, very unique way. And so the believer is one with Christ, for the positive affirmation and for the realization of the negative features of dragging Him into your evil. He is unstained by it, as the sunlight is unstained, though it shines on the grossest sin; but, nonetheless, you abuse His holiness in such activity.

So Paul argues against sex sin by the union of the believer to Christ; and that's exactly where Matthew is in chapter 18 verse 5. He is saying we are one with the Lord; and whoever receives us, receives Him. Now, lemme say it very simply, folks. How you treat Christians is exactly how you treat Jesus Christ. Now, that goes for you whether you're a Christian or not. Anybody. Verse 5, "Whosoever...anybody...shall receive." Decomy, to receive as a guest, to welcome, to treat with kindness and love therefore. In other words, to embrace someone, to take them in, to receive them. "In my name...Because they belong to Me, because they represent Me, because they are one with Me." In other words, when you embrace one who belongs to Jesus Christ, when you welcome them as a guest, when you treat them with care and with protection and with kindness and with love, you are doing that to Jesus Christ.

Now, that's the bottom line principle. Notice that it says there this...or "one such little child." Verse 5, verse 5 says, "One such little child." What does that mean? Some have thought that it meant an actual child. I don't think so. I don't think that's the point of the text. The child that Jesus has in His arms while He's teaching this chapter is an analogy. The child is a demonstration, a symbol, an illustration. He's talking here about one such little child. What such little child?

Well, the little child in verse 4. What little child is that? It's the one who humbles himself as the illustration of the child. What in verse 3, "Becoming as a little child." In other words, he's talking about the same little child that entered the Kingdom, the same little child whose humility made him great, is the same little child that you're to receive. It is the spiritual little child, the believer, the one that comes to Christ. It's not talking about the infant. It's talking about how you treat one of God's children who came to Him in humility, who came to Him in simple childlike faith, which was the whole point, as we saw, of verses 3 and 4 in our study last week. No matter how lowly that child is, no matter how humble, no matter how lacking in sophistication, no matter how lacking in power or in fame or in grandeur, no matter if it is an ignoble, if it is the poor, if it is the least among men. That little one who belongs to Jesus Christ, even one such one, is to be received as if you are receiving Jesus Christ Himself. So how you treat Christians is how you treat Him.

Look at Matthew 25 verse 34; and here we come to the judgment of the sheep and the goats at the Second Coming of Christ; and, "The King says to them on the right hand, 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me food. I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink. I was a stranger, and you took Me in; naked, and you clothed Me. I was sick, and you visited Me. I was in prison, and you came to Me.' And then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when saw we Thee hungry and fed Thee, or thirsty and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger and took Thee in, or naked and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came to Thee?' And the King shall answer and say unto them, 'Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, you have done it unto Me.' Then shall He say unto them on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave Me no food. I was thirsty, and you gave Me no drink. I was a stranger, and you took Me not in. Naked, and you clothed Me not. Sick and in prison, and you visited Me to.' The shall they also answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when saw we Thee hungry or athirst or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee?' Then shall He answer them, saying, 'Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me.' And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

How you treat God's people is how you treat Jesus Christ. Very important truth. That's the basic principle. However lowly, however you may affirm that believer to be the least, the kindness, the care, the protection that you give to that believer to keep him from stumbling and from sinning is exactly

how you treat Jesus Christ. That's the principle. That's the positive.

Let's look at the negative, the peril. Verse 6 and 7. Verse 6 says, "But," now here's the adversative, the other side of it. "Whosoever," in or out of the church, folks, saved or unsaved, Christian or non-Christian...whoever, doesn't matter. "Shall offend," cause to stumble. How do you offend...a Christian? By causing them to do what? To sin. That's the only thing it could mean. To trap them, to catch them in a trap, a death trap, a sin trap, to make them stumble into evil. It's the very opposite of verse 5 where you protect them, where you care for them, where you receive them as one who belongs to Jesus Christ.

You know, if Christ were to give you a life and say, "This was...this belongs to Me. Would you protect that for Me?" and He were here literally to hand that life to you, I think you'd probably be very concerned to take care of that life. Well, that's how it is with every Christian. Every Christian. When you care for every Christian as one who belongs intimately, personally to Jesus Christ and is one with Him in spiritual union, that is the way you are to receive God's people.

But, on the other hand, "If you cause one of these little ones who believe in Me," and there we find that He can't be talking about physical children, micron, little, tiny infants can't believe in Him. He's talking about those believers who are classified in this whole chapter as infants or childlike. When you cause them to sin..."It were better...or it would be preferable, or it would profit you instead of that...that a millstone were hanged about your neck, and you were drowned in the depths of the sea." You would be better off dead than alive offending a Christian, making 'em sin. You see, God is not only concerned that we not sin, but that we not make other people sin....Better you should be dead. Beneficial you should be dead. Profitable that you should be dead rather than do that. Preferable. The language here is really vivid.

You know, in those days, they crushed corn to make flour, to make bread and things; and they would have in the home a little stone; and it would be sort of bowled out, and another stone; and they would just go around and around until they crushed the corn. That is not the stone that is referred to here. This is the millstone. Literally, in the Greek, mulassanikas, the mule stone or the ass's stone. This is not the little one you had in the house. This is the one that was pulled by the mule, the one that Sampson was tied up to when he was grinding grain in his blindness. A beast had to pull it. A massive, huge stone, weighing tons. Huge would come into their minds when they heard mulassanikas.

It would be better if you took a stone like that, tied it around your neck, and, literally, in the Greek, it says drowned far out in the open sea. Taken way out with a stone weighing tons around your neck and poonk, and I mean you'd go to the bottom like a rocket...

Jews didn't drown people for any kind of crime. It was, to them, a horrible, unimaginable punishment. And to be drowned all alone with a millstone around your neck in some far off region of the ocean was terrifying. The Romans did that. The Jews didn't...That's what Jesus says would be better for you, a lonely, terrorizing, shocking, painful end to your life. You would be better off dead with the worst kind of death imaginable than to offend a Christian, to cause that Christian to sin.

Oh, what a lesson. I can imagine there were a few gulps in the room, because the disciples had been around there for a while making each other jealous, envious, bitter, resentful, hateful, proud, self-seeking, causing each other to sin. So the thought is marvelous. Those who come into God's Kingdom are small infants. They're children. They're the weak. They're the lowly, and their own resources are limited. They're children. They're infants, and infants need care, and they need protection, and they need guarding, and they don't need exposure to danger. Children are lowly. They're weak. They need to be cared for. They need to be protected. God expects that with his family, and we must never cause His children to sin. It is an enormous crime, enormous.

Think of it, Father and Mother. Think of it in relation to your own children. Do you cause 'em to sin? Think of it, husband, in relation to your wife, wife in relation to your husband and the relationships that go beyond that. To ruin the beautiful character of a saint, to mar the lovely beauty of God's child, to scar the image of Jesus Christ in a believer by seducing him or her to evil is a heinous crime. You'd be better to be drowned in the middle of the sea with a millstone.

Now, I need to stop at this point...because I need to just suggest to you some ways that we do this, so we'll know how not to do it. How do we make people sin, and how can we avoid it? Well, the first way we make people sin is by directly tempting them. That's right. Satan can use us. The world can use us. The flesh can use us to be the direct source of temptation. We know that. We've had people who come to us and say, "Let's do this." "Well, that's not right to do." "I know, but we'll get away with it." From the time you're little, you hear that deal. "Oh, listen, we paid enough tax in that last year, honey. I mean just go ahead and put it down. I know we didn't have a right claim that deduction, but put it down anyway. They'll never know." And so you have led someone into sin. Better you should be drowned in the middle of the sea.

Or you let your children expose themselves to garbage and filth on television or at the theater or wherever, in the things they read. You are leading that child. Better you should be dead. Or maybe in your business, you're getting your employees involved in that which is illegal and illicit and not right, and you're causing those who are Christian employees in your business to do things that are not right. Better you should be dead than seduce God's people. Young man take a young girl out and try to get to compromise her virtue. Better you should be drowned, my friend, than that you should steal the virtue of some lovely young girl...

So, you see, the direct temptation route is the first way that we can actually cause people to sin. Eve was the classic illustration. She sinned, and then she just caused Adam to sin. He wasn't even deceived. And then there was Aaron who caused the whole...the whole nation of Israel to sin in the golden calf. And then the classic old testament illustration -- I wished I had time to develop the whole thing -- I...I spent quite a bit of time one...almost one full day just tracing the life of Jeroboam, starting in 1 Kings chapter 12; and it says that Jeroboam made Israel to sin; and he is the leading illustration in all of Biblical history of somebody who makes somebody else to sin. He led the whole nation into idolatry, and Jeroboam sinned and made Israel to sin; and you know what it does in 1 Kings 12, and then in 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 21, 22, 2 Kings 3, 2 Kings 10, 2 Kings 13, 2 Kings 14, 15, 23. All through 1 and 2 Kings, as it chronicles all of the kings, it says, "Of many of them, and he did like Jeroboam who made Israel to sin." Jeroboam not only was a vile, wretched, ungodly sinner himself; but he led the whole nation into sin...and he is written down for history. You just read 1 Kings and 2 Kings, and you'll see his name over and over and over and over; and some of the chapters I mentioned have his name in it four and five times as the one who originally made Israel sin. That is a terrifying indictment.

You come into Matthew 5, and what does Jesus say? The Pharisees are saying, "Why, we wouldn't commit adultery. Oh, we don't do that." Jesus said, "I'm telling you...in verse 32... that whoever puts away or divorces his wife except for the cause of sexual sin causes her to commit adultery. You make your wives into adulteresses." And then if you follow the Biblical pattern, as I said earlier, here are the Pharisees making their women into adulteresses, because they divorced them without right grounds; and when they remarry, they become adulteresses. Whoever marries them is an adulterer. They remarry. They're adulterers, and the ones they remarry are adulteresses. Jesus says, "You say don't commit adultery. I say you commit it all over the place. You make people into adulterers and adulteresses." Better you should be dead.

And in Revelation chapter 2 in verse 14, the church of Pergamos is indicted by our Lord, and for what? "I have a few things against you, because you have there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam." What is the doctrine of Balaam? "Who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication." The doctrine of Balaam is teaching God's people to sin. When you teach God's people to sin, you permit the doctrine of Balaam to sin.

If you go down in the same chapter to the church at Thyatira letter, you find they had in that church, verse 20, "A woman named Jezebel. She calls herself a prophetess. She teaches and seduces My servant to commit fornication and eat things sacrificed to idols. She teaches false religion and false living." Jezebel is condemned, because she seduced people into sin. Balaam was condemned because he seduced Israel into sin. Jeroboam was condemned because he seduced Israel into sin, as well. God does not look favorably on those who make His people sin. Now it is not to say that they're not responsible on their own, but it is to say that, when the judgment is passed out, not only the one who did the sin will be held culpable, but the one who led that one into that sin...

So different is God from this that confidently can we pray in the disciple's prayer, "Lead us not into...what?... temptation." Knowing full well that God will never do that. In James 1, He says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted of God, for God tempts no man to sin.'" God would never do that to His people. He leads them away from that; and if you're living on His terms, then you're gonna be doing exactly the same thing. So we cry out in that prayer what is an affirmation of truth, "Lord, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." I think of the illustration of Peter in Luke 22:31, the Lord said, "Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith fail not." The Lord doesn't lead His people into it. He leads 'em away from it; and if we wanna be Christ-like, we have to have that same perspective.

So the first way that we can lead people into sin is by direct temptation, by running a business where we do something wrong and make Christian people a part of it, by having a...a relationship with our wife where we compromise our wife's virtue by taking her places or making her do things or leading her into things that aren't right, where we lead our children into evil for our own gratification or by our own stupidity, by doing like Jezebel, by teaching doctrine that isn't Biblical. I think you commit the...the heinous of all crimes. That's why the Bible speaks so forcefully against false teachers, because they lead God's people into the worst kind of sin; and that is a misrepresentation of who God is; and that's the severest of all, because if your God isn't right, you can't settle anything. So false teachers are the ultimate who are guilty in this regard...

There's a second way in which we can lead people into sin, and that is an indirect way. The first is by being direct source of seduction or temptation. The second is the indirect way. This usually comes by provoking people. I think it could be illustrated a lot of ways; but for the sake of time, lemme just mention Ephesians 6:4 where Paul says to parents, I think pateras embraces father and mother there, "Parents provoke not your children to wrath. Provoke not your children to wrath." Don't exasperate your children. Don't frustrate your children; and you remember when we went through that passage, we talked about the ways you can do that. You can do that by overprotection. In other words, you hover them...hover over them so much they never begin to feel any liberty. They never develop their own personality. They feel kept in and held in, and they get resentful and bitter and angry and rebellious.

You can do it by favoritism, favoring one child over another, so the other one becomes envious and jealous. You can do it by pushing them to achievement levels that are impossible for them; and they have absolutely no sense of accomplishment, no sense of affirmation and satisfaction; and so they get resentful and bitter toward those who push them without ever encouraging them.

Now, you can do the same to your children by failing to sacrifice for them, by making sure they never get in your way. They never intrude on your life, so they always feel like a burden. They always feel like a problem; and they begin to look at themselves as a pain to everybody around them; and then

they become bitter and resentful. You can do it to them by failing to allow for them to make some mistakes now and then, by expecting some kind of perfection. You can do it by neglect. You can do it by bitter, angry words that cut them down and cause them to feel angry and bitter toward you. You can do it by physical punishment that's abusive; and you can do shades of those things, not only in a parent-child relationship, but in a husband-wife relationship. In any relationship, you can drive a person to sinning by your lack of sensitivity, by your lack of care, your lack of concern. You can cause Christians to sin directly or indirectly by being a seducer on the one hand, or by just being an exasperator on the other hand.

There's a third way I think that we can cause people to sin, and that is by setting a sinful example...If we set a sinful example, we'll lead other people into sin, perhaps people in our own family, people that know us and follow our life. I always think of the little boy who one night stole outta the house in the midst of the snow in the dead of winter. His father was going to the bar. He was an alcoholic; and he was just taking one step after another; and he heard something behind him crunching; and he noticed his little five-year-old was hopping from one footstep to the next; and he said, "Where are you going?" He said, "I'm just following your footsteps, Daddy." They said in the story that's the last time the man ever took a drink.

Somebody's following in your steps, too; and if you just have a...an example that isn't what it oughta be, you're leading other people into sinning. If you're not faithful as a person ought to be faithful to the things of God, to the people of God, to the Word of God, to the throne of God in prayer; if you're not faithful to live an uncompromising life, you're setting a pattern that'll lead other people into sin; because it'll say to them, "You don't have to do these things. They're optional. Here's a Christian. He's been a Christian or she's been a Christian longer than I have. Look at her life. It isn't all it oughta be. I guess I'll be all right if mine isn't either." It's a very serious issue. People are watching us; and we have to be careful; and so I think we could say two things about this aspect. We wanna be careful of our examples, No. 1, because people are following us; and so we don't wanna lead them into sin by overt acts of sin.

That's why Paul said to Timothy, "Be thou an example to the believer in all things. Otherwise, you'll lead them into sin." The assumption is they're following you. Paul could say so wonderfully, "Be you followers of me as I am of Christ," because he knew if they followed him, they'd follow the right pattern. Very important.

There's a second thing under that example idea. In the idea of example, it's not only that we set a bad example when we lead people right into sin, but we set a bad example also when we abuse our liberty; and we're not talking about necessarily the... the...the right and the wrong things, but the things that are in the middle -- that gray area. When we get the feeling that we're so free in Christ that we can just do whatever we want no matter how it affects anybody else, we will lead people into sin.

I'll show you why. Look at Romans 14 for a moment. Romans 14...Now Romans 14 is based on a premise, and you have to understand this; and that is that some people see things differently than other people. Would you agree to that? In terms of things in life. For example, here you have Gentiles, let's say, who are saved out of paganism, right? They've been delivered from gross occultic idol worship, paganism, immorality, the whole shot. They come to Christ. Let's say they go over to somebody's house who's a Christian, been a Christian a long time. They're gonna have dinner. The Christian lays out the dinner; and they say, "Boy, that was the best...that was the best meat I've had in a long time. Where'd you get that?" "Oh, we bought that at the...the temple of Diana." "Oh, you did?" All of a sudden, gag. Oh, you say, "What's wrong the meat at the temple of Diana?" "Oh, nothing, the price is probably very good."

But you know where it came from? People came to offer their offering to Diana. There were, oh, many, so many priests and...and the priests could eat only so much; and what they couldn't eat, they went around to the back of the temple; and they sold, right? To make profit. Now, is there anything wrong with that? Paul says there's nothing wrong with that, because an idol isn't anything anyway, so eat up and enjoy. However, if it's gonna gag somebody who just came out of idolatry, then don't eat it. In other words, you've got to be a little bit sensitive to the conscience of somebody else. You understand? Until they move along in their freedom.

People often say that to me in relation to rock music. Do I like rock music; and my reply to that is there are some people who come out of that kind of thing for whom it would be such a reminder of all the filth and dirt of the past of their life that it couldn't do anything but destroy their liberty; and it would probably do what this would do to these people. It would push them deeper into legalism, because they'd tighten up all the more, because they couldn't stand the guilt they felt when they did things they really were free to do, but didn't yet grow to that freedom.

And so Paul says, "Let's not make each other stumble." Verse 13 of Romans 14. I'll just condense the chapter. "Don't judge one another, but just judge this: that you don't put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in your brother's way." Because he says in verse 14, "It isn't that something is unclean in itself, but to him that thinks it's unclean, it is unclean." Right? So don't do it if it's gonna offend him. "If your brother...verse 14, or 15, rather...is grieved with your food, you're not walking in love. Don't eat that food." Why would you wanna destroy the guy? Why would you wanna lead him into sin? And what would his sin be? He would condemn you. He would judge you. He'd be angry at you. He'd feel guilty, and he'd push himself deeper into legalism, and he'd misinterpret his freedom.

So verse 21 sums it up. "It's good not to eat meat or to drink wine nor anything by which your brother stumbles, offended, or is made weak." Now, in our society, the drinking wine is still a stumbling block to some people. That's why I don't do that; and it's a perfectly good liberty to give up...for the sake of those who would be offended; and they're not only talking about spiritual legalists at this point, but

people, for example, who are ex-alcoholics, who would do anything in the world to stay away from one small drink and wouldn't wanna be offended by being led into that.

First Corinthians 8, again, says the same thing. I just call it to your attention very briefly. First Corinthians 8, the same principle in verse 9, "Take heed lest by any means the liberty you have becomes a stumbling block to them that are weak. If any man see thee who has knowledge, sitting at the table in the idol temple, shall not the conscience of him who is weak be...be emboldened to eat the things offered to idols." In other words, let's say they had a little snack bar at the temple, and so you went down to the temple. You thought it was a good price, and they had good stuff, and so you're sitting there eating, and somebody comes along and says, "Ohhhhh, I'm free to eat there, too," and he goes in, and he eats, only his conscience can't handle that, and he feels guilty, and he feels browbeaten, and he feels intimidated by that, and he goes out, and he begins to resent you, and he begins to crawl back further from his liberty and deeper into his legalism, and he loses the...the growth that he would have in the Lord. He hasn't gained anything. You've caused him to sin, so don't do that.

So in...in the example arena, two things come to mind. We cannot lead people into sin by the direct example of sinning, and we cannot lead people into sin by the abuse of our liberty. The point is to raise our consciousness to the fact that we not only are to deal with sin in our own life, but in the lives of those around us.

Lemme give you a fourth one. I believe we cause people to sin also, and this would be the most subtle of all, by failing to lead them to righteousness. Some people say, "Well, you know, I don't go around seducing people into sin; and I don't go around provoking people into sin indirectly; and I certainly don't wanna go abusing my liberty or giving an example of sinfulness. I just basically do my own thing, mind my own business. I'm trying my best, and maybe that's the biggest sin of all, is you're not stimulating somebody else to righteousness. Over and over and over, the New Testament talks about provoking people to righteousness. It talks about encouraging them to righteousness. It talks about building them up. It talks about edifying them. It talks about, in Hebrews 10:24, stimulating them to love and good works; and it is a positive thing that we are to be out there stimulating one another to righteousness. The condemnation of the prophets in Jeremiah 23 was that they did not lead God's people into holiness. They did not lead God's people into righteousness.

And so it is...it is to cause a brother to sin, to fail to strengthen that brother. God's given you gifts, spiritual gifts, talents, ministry opportunity; and, unless you're using that to the fullest of your ability and God's giftedness, you are not feeding into the body of Christ what is an element of necessity for them to grow. So you can't just sit back and say, "Well, I'm not doing any of the things I shouldn't be doing." You gotta get out there and be doing the one thing you should be doing...

Some people might, you know, this...this prevents the monastic approach. "Boy, I don't wanna be guilty of doing anything to anybody, so I'm gonna buy a cabin in the desert. Goodbye. I'm splitting. I don't want this millstone thing."... No, the idea is you gotta stay in the community of the people of God and stimulate 'em to love and good works, and lead them to righteousness, and set a positive example for them, and be a leader positively in...into that which is right, and be a provoker into that which is right. Just turn the tables. Instead of seducing people to sin, lead 'em to righteousness. Instead of causing them to be provoked and exasperated, cause them to be joyous and full of praise. Instead of setting an example to sin, set an example to holiness. Instead of misusing your liberty, use your liberty rightly, so that they grow and are nurtured. Just be the positive influence...

William Barkley tells a story about a...an old man who was on his deathbed, and he was distressed. He was troubled. He was filled with anxiety; and so the people around him tried to find out why; and, finally, before he died, he told 'em something that seemed so trite but had obviously influenced him so powerfully. He said this. "When we were boys at play, one day at a crossroads, we reversed a signpost; and I've never ceased all my life to wonder how many people were sent the wrong direction by what we did." Well, maybe we could somewhat catch the spirit of that man in the spiritual dimension. Our life is a signpost; and, if it isn't pointing the right way, then I wonder how many people are going the wrong direction. It would be better for you than to do that, if you were dead...drowned...

So, husband, look how you lead your wife. Wife, look how you influence your husband. Parents, how about your children? How about the people you work with, the people at school, your friends, the people in the church, the people you don't know, but you meet inadvertently? Are you influencing them for God? Are you causing them to sin? And you that don't even know Christ, you that aren't even Christians, you'll be held responsible before God for how you treat God's people.

Look at verse 7. This is very straightforward. "Woe," that means curse, judgment term. "Woe unto the world because of offenses! Woe, woe." He says, "I curse this world for offending My children." And it does. We've all been victimized in this world, the purveyors of the filth and garbage of this world, not only through the media, but those evil people in this world, those godless, Christless people who would lead us into sin. "Woe unto those people." Then he says, "It must needs be that offenses come." In other words, it is inevitable, since the world is what it is. It cannot let believers alone. The world will always be setting sin traps and death traps. That's the nature of its fallenness, but that in no way eliminates the culpability and the guilt of an individual; and so the verse closes, "It must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes." You'd be better off dead than to offend, because of what you're gonna pay when you offend...Woe, curse...

Those who seduce God's children to sin, those who hinder their spiritual life have the promise...of cursing from God... Even to the littlest child, they are to be cared for as if you were caring for Christ. One of the...fellas in our handicap ministry came to me one Sunday, and he said, "I did a bad thing, John." I said, "You did?" He said, "I did a very bad thing." I said, "Well, what did you do?" He said,

"I...I got drunk." I said, "You did? I can't imagine that." He said, "I got drunk, and it was a bad thing." I said, "Well, why did you get drunk?" He said, "My...my brother made me drunk. He...he held open my mouth; and he...he poured stuff in me and made me drunk; and then they laughed at me." And he said, "But I asked Jesus to forgive me." He asked me, he said, "Do you think He did?" I said, "I know He did."

"Woe to the one by whom the offense came even to cause the least of these, My little ones, to sin." And the peril leads us to the prevention in verse 8 and 9. You say, "Well, I don't wanna do this." I don't blame you. I don't either. How can you prevent it? And at this point we get the heart of the matter. "Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut it off, cast it from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into Gehenna hell, hell fire."

Now, here our Lord draws a principle. It is a principle He first gave in Matthew 5:29 and 30. We studied it there. In its context there, it was related to unbelievers; and what Jesus was saying there to unbelievers is simply this. Whatever it takes for you to deal drastically with your sin, do it. It's better than entering into...what?...hell. Better...better to live your life maimed than to go to hell forever. Now, that's hyperbole. I mean He's not literally telling them to chop off all their limbs, but He is saying, "Take drastic measures with sin...or you'll go to hell."

Now, that principle was given to unbelievers; but, here, our Lord just pulls that same principle up; and here it can relate to unbelievers; because unbelievers can be in view in verse 7; and He is saying to them, "You unbelievers, you better deal drastically with your sin, because sin damns."...And to believers, we can apply it as well. If sin is that serious, if sin is that which damns and should be dealt with that drastically, then we better deal drastically with it also. Right? So what is the prevention then? Simply this. It isn't to concentrate on what you're doing with others. It's to concentrate on what you're doing with whom? Yourself. Deal drastically with your own sin...put a watch over your eyes. Guard your hands and your feet, where they go and what they do. Be careful what you see. Take drastic measures, because you'll never be able to keep from causing someone else to sin unless you are not sinning yourself. Do you understand that?

Because if you're in sin, the pattern is there being demonstrated to others...It's a simple principle. Take drastic action when getting rid of whatever causes you to sin. Take drastic action. Don't flirt with it. Get rid of it. That's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "I beat my body to bring it into subjection, you know. I'd do anything. I beat my body rather than allow it to move into sin."

Jesus isn't dealing with some kind of wooden, literal, literalism where all the disciples would be stumps at this point, and so would all of us; but He is simply, in a metaphorical way, saying, "Deal dramatically and drastically with your sin." Nothing is so precious that it should be maintained if it

leads us to sin...Just as sin leads men to hell, it can lead the believer to the depths of chastening and lead another Christian into sin.

So the principle is this. Every Christian is one with Christ; and, when you receive a Christian, you receive Christ. The peril is that, if you offend a Christian by causing them to sin through your seduction, through your indirect provocation, through your example of evil, through your misused liberty, or through your failure to give righteous direction to that life, if you cause them to sin, it would be better for you to be drowned immediately than to do that; because the price for doing that is so high. Instead of doing that, take drastic measures to deal with your own sin. The bottom line is this. Why would a Christian want to assist Satan in his work of tempting God's children to do evil? You wouldn't, would you? I wouldn't.

Father, we come to You to close our time this morning. Very pointed lesson from our Lord. We know that we enter the Kingdom as little children...In proportion to the humility of our child-likeness, we are great in the Kingdom...and now we learn that we must be treated like children, and children have to be cared for, and they have to be kept from evil, and they have to be kept from harm, and so, Father, help us...not to lead each other into sin, even as You would not do that, but to lead each other to righteousness by all that we say and are...and do. That we may never be guilty...of leading one of Your little ones to stumble. Help us to be zealous for the purity of others, as we are for our own, for they, like us, are one with You, and we would not, for a moment...desire to defile You...We thank You, Father, that in the power of the Holy Spirit and the purity which He brings in our hearts, this is possible. To that end, we pray for every life. Amen.

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