

# 37

## STUMBLING BLOCK AND MOTIVATION FOR GOOD WORKS

*Romans 14:13-23*

### I. Introduction

- A. Rom 14:1-15:13 is a unit concerning “stumbling-block principle.” 1 Cor 8-10 also concerns this principle.
- B. Much of this principle was covered by Dr. Kruger in Rom 14:1-12. Rom 14:13-23 reinforces the point and (1) adds the explicit language of “stumbling block” and (2) adds an explicit broad-ethical principle (Rom 14:23).

### II. Romans 14:13-19

- A. “Stumbling Block” in Bible
  - o One Hebrew word in OT (שׂוֹבַל) is translated by two Greek nouns and a verb (σκάνδαλον, πρόσκομμα, προσκόπτω) in LXX and NT. Both nouns are used in Rom 14:13; verb in Rom 14:21.
  - o Stumbling block/stone is always negative in Bible and usually metaphorical of sin. The literal Lev 19:14 is probably the background for much of the negative metaphorical usage. E.g., see Ps 119:165, Isa 8:14 (quoted in Rom 9:32-33, 1 Pet 2:8), Ezek 3:20, Rom 16:17, 1 Cor 1:23, 1 Cor 8:9.
- B. Distinction between “giving” an offense and “taking” an offense
  - o “Taking” an offense is when “by ill will or malicious intent of mind wrenched into occasion for offense . . . [by] persons of bitter disposition and pharisaical pride. . . . Thus we shall so temper the use of our freedom as to allow for the ignorance or our weak brothers, but for the rigor of the Pharisees, not at all! [See Matt 15:12-14] . . . We have need also to assert our freedom if through the unjust demands of false apostles it be endangered in weak consciences [see Gal 2:3-5]” (Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.11-12).
- C. Rom 14:19. “It may at times be a difficult practical question, whether most good would result from compliance with the prejudices of others, or from disregarding them. But where there is a sincere desire to do right, and a willingness to sacrifice our own inclinations for the good of others, connected with prayer for divine direction, there can be little danger of serious mistake” (Hodge, *Romans*, 431).



### III. Romans 14:20-23

- A. Rom 14:20. Paul gives his view of the food question—the “strong” are correct that the food is clean. See also 1 Cor 8:4-6, 1 Tim 4:1-5.
  - o This shows another nuance to stumbling-block principle, in a *teaching* situation, OK to assert correct view.
  
- B. Rom 14:23. Broad-Ethical Principle. “For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.”
  - o In Rom 14:22-23a, Paul takes “faith” to be one’s view of food question, and then, in 14:23b, he includes the broad principle using “faith” as our overarching doctrine and connection to Christ.
  - o WCF 16 “Good Works.”
    - A truly good work must have both an outward component (16.1) and an inward component (16.2).
    - WCF 16.7. Works done by unregenerate men, although, for the matter of them, they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God; they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God. And yet, their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing unto God.



## Discussion Groups

1. How does the literal Lev 19:14 stumbling related to the metaphorical stumbling better aid your understanding and motivation to fulfill this principle?

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2. Construct a theoretical situation that might be considered “taking” an offense.

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3. How does the typical non-Christian Charlottian consider the inward component of a good work?

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