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

- One Hebrew word in OT (תַּנָּךְ) is translated by two Greek nouns and a verb (σκάλπιον, προκάτοχος, πρόκατοπος) in LXX and NT. Both nouns are used in Rom 14:13; verb in Rom 14:21.

- 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

- “Taking” an offense is when “by ill will or malicious intent of mind wrenched into occasion for offense . . . [by] persons of bitter disposition and pharisaiical 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?

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

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