

## Stumbling Block

### 1- Don't Be a Stumbling Block, Be a Building Block

A week before my ordination, my family and I were visiting the monastery of St. Paul, located in the eastern desert of Egypt next to the Red Sea. Our gracious tour guide, a very simple monk, unlocked all the ancient churches and showed us many of the ancient buildings. One room that he showed us was the mill room where the monks of old used to grind wheat to make flour for bread. The monks would place the wheat on a flat stone surface, and then a donkey would pull another huge piece of stone, called the mill stone, to roll over, crush, and grind the wheat as illustrated in the following picture.



The millstone I saw was almost 5 ft. in diameter and was over 1 ft. thick and probably weighed on the order of a few tons! Seeing an actual millstone brought new meaning to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ when He said, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!” (Matt. 18:6-7).

In this passage, our Lord is referring to those who are stumbling blocks to others. A stumbling block, in this context, is someone who encourages someone else to “stumble” and commit sin. It is clear from the passage that our Lord really despises stumbling blocks. Our Lord says that “it would be better for [those who are stumbling blocks] if a millstone were hung around [their] neck[s], and [they] were drowned in the depth of the sea.” Just as parents protect their children and prevent them from associating with bad company, our heavenly Father desires to protect his children by ridding the world of stumbling blocks. In fact, this was the context for the harsh criticism of stumbling blocks. In the preceding verses, our Lord sits a small child in His midst and speaks about how those who are “converted and become as little children” will be the “greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3-4). Then our Lord goes on to rebuke those who cause His children to stumble.

Unfortunately, if we are to honestly examine ourselves, we might find that we may be a stumbling block to others. Some people are obvious stumbling blocks as they deliberately cause others to commit sin or ungodly acts while some people unintentionally or unknowingly cause others to fall into sin. Over the course of this series, I, with the grace of God, will provide plenty of examples of common stumbling blocks with the hope of converting those who are stumbling blocks into building blocks.

A building block is someone who lifts others up and encourages others to behave righteously. St. Paul clearly teaches us in his epistles that we should be building blocks. He says, “comfort each other and edify one another” (1 Thess. 5:11) and “pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Rom. 14:19). The term “edify” means to “instruct or improve morally or intellectually.” Interestingly, in the original Greek “edify” relates to the actual construction of homes. In the context of our church, the building materials or building blocks refer to people. St. Paul tells the Corinthians, “[Y]ou are God’s building.... [A]s a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it...” (1 Cor. 3:9-10). This verse teaches us that we must allow qualified people to help us “build” or grow in our spirituality. It also teaches us that a building is not supported by one single stone, but requires that multiple stones share the load and stress of the stones that are stacked on top of them. The same analogy can be used to describe the Church. We should ask ourselves: Are we supporting others? Are we contributing to the well-being of others? Each member of the Church should determine if they are fulfilling the role of a building block or stumbling block.

In the next articles, we will discuss two infamous people in the Old Testament and how they caused the entire nation of the Israel to stumble.

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