



Satan's Deadly Trap – Part 9
Various Scripture
GCSP – 11/14/2009

It is easy to determine what is important to a person simply based on how much time he or she devotes to it. Many Christians, for example, give lip service to how important the Bible is to their life, but if you were to be able to track the actual time they spend interacting with God's Word on a weekly basis you are likely to find a multitude of other things and activities that are much more important to them.

A world-renown concert violinist was once asked how she became so proficient at her craft, and her answer was "Planned neglect." She went on to explain that she had to plan on neglecting many other less important aspects of her life so she could devote the necessary time to learn the violin. She neglected family, friends, and most social aspects of her life for years to develop the talent she displayed on the stage.

I'm sure there are areas of our lives that could stand to be neglected but there are obviously others that we should not. Somewhere between the dedication, and thus neglect of other things of this violinist, and where most Christians are right now would probably be a good place to begin.

In the same way, the Apostle Paul displays what is important to him by the amount of space he devotes to them in Scripture. And obviously since Paul only wrote what he was inspired to write by the Holy Spirit, then we best be careful to pay attention when he devotes a large chunk of space to a particular topic.

In the Book of Romans, Paul devotes two verses to developing a Christian mind. He gives us six verses on the topic of having a proper estimation of yourself and others and the need to encourage one another. Seven verses were needed to for issues of church and state. Seven more verses were devoted to our conduct in light of Jesus returning, and thirteen verses were needed to discuss our call to love one another.

But Paul devotes thirty-five verses to a topic that quite frankly most Christians ignore altogether. It is the last major subject he deals with in the Book of Romans as well, thus being a topic he wanted his readers to walk away with fresh in their minds. The topic is how we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ who do not think or behave as we believe they should.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Romans**. We are just going to look at two of the thirty-five verses right now and then we will see how this applies to us in regards to offence.

Romans 14:1; 13

Let's pray.

Last week we saw that Jesus is "**a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.**" We saw how Jesus purposely offended the Pharisees, the people of His hometown, His earthly family, His disciples, and His close friends. And He did all of this because He was

focused on pleasing the Father in everything He did. Jesus did not bow to the desires of anyone else outside His Father. He didn't chase after the people He offended in this way; but rather He let them go.

We saw in **Matthew 15:13** that those who were offended by the Word of God, will be uprooted by God and those whom the Father uproots must be turned loose. I showed you in the account of Samuel leaving King Saul behind after God had rejected, or uprooted, him that Samuel would have forfeited the oil, or the Holy Spirit, or the anointing in his life if he chose to go back to or chase after that which God had rejected.

Like the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, we must be on the lookout for those who choose to leave, and we must be ready to welcome them with open arms if they return to the fold, and obviously there are many Scriptures that teach us to pray for them, but we are not told to chase after them; Jesus never did it, and that should be enough evidence for us.

Jesus devoted His time to His relationship with the Father and to those who remained with Him; those who desired to learn and to obey what had been taught.

As I mentioned a few moments ago, Jesus is "**a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.**" And since all genuine believers, which I trust includes you, now have Christ living within them, you will also offend people at times. The struggle we all deal with is when is it right to offend and when is it wrong?

So before we dig into the verses in **Romans** turn with me to the Gospel of **Matthew**.

Matthew 17:24-27

Now I don't know about you, but is this the same Jesus who offended just about everyone who crossed His path last week? Don't get me wrong, obviously Jesus did not offend everybody He came in contact with, but the passages we looked at last week never showed us one iota of concern on Jesus' part when it came to offending anyone; why now is He concerned about offending someone?

Jesus tells Peter that the sons and daughters of the King are free from taxes, yet He then tells him to pay the tax, albeit with money supernaturally provided in the mouth of a fish. And He tells Peter to pay the tax so they do not offend the tax collectors.

What's the difference between the Jesus we see in this passage and the Jesus we saw in all the passages we studied last week?

Turn over a few pages with me in your Bibles to **Matthew 20**.

Matthew 20:26-28

The key to determining the difference in when it is right or wrong to offend is found in **verse 28**: "**The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...**" Jesus was free; He didn't owe anything to anyone; He was subject to no man, yet He chose to use His liberty and freedom to serve.

Let's look at one more passage. Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Galatians**.

Galatians 5:13

Another word for liberty is privilege, and we are not to use our privilege as sons and daughters of the King of kings to serve ourselves. Our liberty, our freedom, our privilege is to be used to serve others. We should live to serve.

I have shown you in the past how the Greek word *doulos* has been mistranslated in most English Bibles; the only possible true translation is slave and most of your Bibles will say servant or bond-servant. We are slaves of Jesus Christ but at the same time we are free. We used to be in bondage to sin and to the will of Satan; and that was an entirely different kind of slavery.

I made that distinction so we would better understand the following comparison that John Bevere makes in his book, and so you do not think I am contradicting myself from the earlier teachings I did on the word *doulos*. In this application we will compare servants and slaves, just understand that I am using the term servant for a slave who is free in Christ and who willingly serves, and the term slave for a person who is in bondage to one thing or another and is unwilling in his or her service.

Bevere says:

- A slave has to, a servant gets to
- A slave does the minimum requirement, a servant gives the maximum
- A slave has to go one mile, a servant chooses to go two miles
- A slave feels robbed, a servant gives
- A slave is bound, a servant is free
- A slave fights for his rights, a servant lays down his rights

Too many Christians are resentful in their attitudes. They give grudgingly, they complain about everything, they are upset because they feel like nobody understands them, they can't figure out why everyone doesn't think the same way they do, etc. Based on our study in this series thus far, it is easy to see that they are in the snare of the devil due to one or many offences in their lives that they won't let go of; they got that banana in their hands and no matter how painful a beating is coming at them, they won't release the banana and enjoy their freedom. They are like Cain who developed a persecution complex and wandered for the rest of his life.

This is the attitude of a slave and a slave is rarely going to offend in the right way; a slave will almost always cause offence in a wrong way.

So let me define right and wrong offences right here before we go any further: The offences we saw last week from Jesus were all from His standing up for God the Father and for His Word. Never once did Jesus offend by standing up for His rights.

In the account we read concerning the temple tax, Jesus and Peter both had the right as children of the Father to forgo paying the temple tax, but standing up for that right would have offended others; and relinquishing that right would not violate any of the principles of God's Word.

And herein lies the problem, most Christians, especially American Christians, feel as if they are entitled and privileged and almost mandated to stand up for their individual rights. We not only stand up for our rights we flaunt our rights. We make sure we get our two cents worth in regardless of the consequences. We pay no mind to what we crush while putting our foot down for our rights.

And this is what Paul devotes thirty-five verses to in **Romans 14-15**.

So turn back with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Romans**.

Romans 14:1

In this section of **Romans**, which goes through **15:13**, Paul is teaching us about the proper use of our freedom, liberty, and privilege. He refers to believers as “**weak**” and “**strong**.” The terms are actually pretty vague and you should not read into them too deeply. The sense of the words in the context of the passage is simply one who fully understands his freedom in Christ and one who is lacking in that full understanding. No overt judgment is passed on either and neither one is overly praised for where they are in their spiritual maturity; it is just a fact of spiritual life that we will be at differing phases of growth throughout our time on earth.

Paul uses a couple of examples to illustrate his point, eating or abstaining from certain foods and observing or not observing certain days set aside for spiritual purposes; but he is again fairly vague in his use of these examples. Because of this it is very clear that he is teaching an overarching principle not dealing with just these two specific issues. So we could easily plug in a multitude of other issues we differ in as we grow in Christ.

Paul is simply saying that we must not argue over differences of opinion when the issues are not as clear as we would like them to be in Scripture. For example, in my recent dealings on Facebook, I posted a video of Ray Comfort and his method of witnessing to people on the street. His method is very biblical although it is a very bold approach. Some of my “friends” are somewhat offended by these methods and posted some pretty argumentative words that were criticizing Ray and his methods. This in turn caused others to fight back and defend Ray. I added a few thoughts and the debate was on.

I realized that I needed to step back and let the thread die down and eventually get buried because there was going to be no stopping this as long as there was fuel on the fire so to speak. No matter which side of any debate you find yourself on, sometimes you have a need to get the last word. As much as that desire was welling up in me it wasn't a hill to die on; it was just differing opinions on how to present the gospel message.

This is exactly what Paul is writing about. I am not going to categorize either side of my illustration as to who was weaker and who was stronger, because that is irrelevant, and because all of us consider ourselves to be in the stronger category. The point is that even though we have the right to stand up for our beliefs, what profit is there in allowing our emotions to get the better of us and cause us to look down upon a brother or sister in Christ over an opinion?

Some of the “struggles” we have faced at times at Grace Church is the understanding and use of spiritual gifts, our method of worship, whether we should have food and coffee available, etc. Some of these struggles are pretty clear in Scripture and we need to address them with some teaching from the pulpit and/or some one-on-one discussions. Other issues are either not clear in Scripture, not mentioned in Scripture, or they are simply left to us by God to handle by personal preference.

For the purpose of illustration allow me to touch on what I have mentioned. Spiritual gifts are taught extensively in the Bible, with **Romans 12** and **1 Corinthians 12-14** being the two most prominent sections. Some believe many of the gifts ceased in operation after the last of the Apostles died, that being John. The problem with this thinking is that there is absolutely no Scripture that teaches that. I have listened to prominent teachers and preachers who believe this way and their arguments are the weakest I have ever heard from them on any subject.

There are obviously many abuses of the gifts and there is some very bad and false teaching about the gifts in many circles, but I have to say that D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has maybe said it best:

*"You notice the list of the gifts that the apostle gives here, '**...whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness**' (**Romans 12:6-8**). Now I think you will all have to agree that whatever you may think of the gift of prophecy, all the others are clearly gifts that have continued in the church ever since apostolic times and are in evidence at the present time. I find it almost laughable that people should say that they do not any evidence of the gifts today. It means, of course, that they are only thinking of speaking in tongues or of prophecy or of miracles. They do not realize that all these others are equally gifts – the apostle does not seem to draw any distinction, but puts them all into the same category. We are entitled, therefore, to argue that if some of these gifts have been in evidence throughout the history of the church and still are, then why not all of them? It is a fair question, and is part of the answer to those who say that the gifts finished with the apostles."*

"Another important argument is that if you feel that there is not much evidence of the working of the gifts in the church in these days, then the explanation may be the low state of the spirituality of the church. One of the greatest dangers, it always seems to me, is to interpret the Scriptures in the light of our experience, instead of testing our experience by the teaching of Scripture. So often that happens at the present time. People lay down as the norm what they have and what they are familiar with, and they test everything by that. But we should rather ask: What is the New Testament picture of the church? How do we come out when tested by that standard? And, I repeat, the result may well be that the absence of the manifestation of gifts is due solely to the low state of spirituality in the church. We know that that is true because Scripture itself teaches that. If a church backslides, or falls from the truth, or limits the truth of God, then she will lose her power; and of course, the history of the church throughout the centuries demonstrates very clearly that this has frequently happened."

*"Let us be very careful, therefore, lest we be found to be 'wresting the Scriptures' simply in an attempt to bolster up our prejudices, or justify our own low state of spirituality. That is what the apostle means in **1 Thessalonians 5:19** when he says, 'Quench not the Spirit.' You lay it down to start with that certain things do not happen, and then, of course, you will find that they do not happen. But your argument has gone in a circle and you have been altogether wrong. That is one of the most common ways of quenching the Spirit...we must be very careful not to limit the work of the Spirit."*

The danger we must avoid when it comes to the gifts of the Spirit is not only in looking down on those who believe if you don't, or don't believe if you do, but also viewing your gift or gifts as more important than someone else's – and that's a whole other sermon.

Another issue that could arise in our church, as it does in many others, is how we express ourselves in worship. I could take you to verse after verse that shows all manner of people in the Bible who lift their arms and hands in worship; I can show you people prostrate on the ground, people kneeling, and even people dancing before the Lord, yet some will look down upon those who do so and some will look down upon those who do not do so. No matter which side of the spectrum you find yourself on you will be in violation of Scripture if you look down on how anyone chooses to worship, as long as they are not violating Scripture.

And the last illustration is having refreshments before or after the church service. It has been talked about on occasion and it simply boils down to preference. We cannot go to chapter and verse to give us an answer on something like this. Some may believe it to be irreverent while others do not. The bottom line is we mustn't look down on those who partake or those who do not partake.

But in all of these issues we must try to discern if we are offending a brother or sister in Christ with our freedom. As we saw last week, if someone gets offended in your obedience to God and His Word, then so be it. But on the issues of opinion and personal preference we must check our motives and our hearts and not offend in the expression of our liberty or privilege.

Romans 14:13

The word for stumbling block is the same Greek word from where we get the word offence. We cannot put an offence in a brother's way when we are dealing with an opinion or a personal preference that we have every right to because of our freedom and privilege in Christ Jesus.

Let me share one more illustration before we move on. A missionary sent me an email this week asking about drinking alcohol. The culture he is in does not have the same hang-ups and taboos our American Christian culture has pertaining to alcohol. I replied to him that the Bible gives us plenty of warning about drinking and it commands us to not get drunk, but there is no prohibition against drinking. The guiding principle needs to be if you could become a stumbling block to another Christian by having that glass of wine. You have the freedom and privilege but you cannot abuse that privilege at the expense of a "weaker" brother or sister.

Hold your place in **Romans** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **1 Corinthians**.

1 Corinthians 8:9; 12

It is clear that we must lay down our rights in all humility. Our liberty and privilege has been given to us for the purpose of service.

Okay, turn back to **Romans** and let's look at one final thought.

Romans 14:19

We should make it our aim to not cause another to stumble, or become offended, because of our personal liberty. What we do may be permissible according to Scripture, but we must ask ourselves, does this seek the edification of another or myself?

Use your liberty and freedom and privilege in Christ to set others free, not to assert your own rights.

So it is okay to offend when being obedient to God and His Word, but it is not okay to offend when simply standing up for your own personal rights.

Let's pray.