

We then, as brother and sisters, are to avoid criticizing one another. Other believers live for the same Lord as we do, and **He is Lord**, not you or me. We will all give account to Him. So we are not to judge the walk of others. The Lord Himself put it clearly and to the point. Briefly, “Judge not that ye be not judged,” Matthew 7:1. He is God’s appointed judge. We are not to busy ourselves with judging others whether in our thoughts, our words or our actions.

But what if someone sins? One who calls himself a Christian? That is a different matter. Then I have a responsibility to approach him about it, and seek his repentance and restoration, Matthew 18:15-18. The local church (the assembly) is the Lord’s designated representative here on earth regarding sinful acts of His own people. If repentance is not forthcoming after their pleadings, the local assembly is to “judge them that are within,” 1Corinthians 5, and put them out until they do repent. Righteousness and holiness is maintained in God’s House. (And if a crime has been committed, the secular government may also apprehend, try, and punish the guilty. We should cooperate with their work.) But differences and disputes about matters not involving doctrines that define Christianity are not to come into judgement by other individual believers or by the local assembly.

There is another way we might overstep our bounds with a fellow believer who lives differently than we. While not condemning him we might somehow undermine his faithful stand for the Lord. We might put a stumbling block in his way that might trip him. Christ is the stumbling block for sinners and particularly Jewish persons. They, as a nation, stumbled over Him and are set aside for now. Others might stumble over Him and be humbled as was Saul of Tarsus who did a “face plant” before the Lord of glory on the road to Damascus. But we don’t want to stumble a fellow believer and cause him or her to fall. The KJV uses the word “offend” for “entrap.” Some have attempted to use this passage to enforce their conscience upon another believer by saying “I am offended by his or her behavior, dress, activities, etc. While such activities may indeed be offensive to another’s sensibilities and views they hardly entrap a believer who is fixed in his own strong beliefs. On the other hand I might do something that truly tempts a weak believer to violate his own conscience before God. He might do something that he considered to be wrong simply because he or she sees another freely doing it. We innocently can be a cause of another’s fall simply because we were not sufficiently aware of the potential affects of our actions on him. Or we might even intentionally flaunt our liberty before a weak believer, thinking to deliver him from his “weak” ideas and customs. Carelessness of another’s

conscience or designed attempts to “release” a weak one from his self imposed “bondage” is not acceptable conduct for a believer. If we stumble a weak one, and cause him to sin, are we not guilty of his sin? How far can we go then, in the goodness of our heart, in seeking to change another brother or sister in Christ for good? Is it really our business? Our innate desires to control others sometimes gets out of control. Much harm is done to earnest conscientious believers who are stumbled in their faith and fall into what is sin to them.

Yet, is it God’s will they remain “weak?” Clearly we are to grow, grow, grow. How does the Lord intend that happen? How does He bring about change and spiritual growth? What would Christ do with him or her? He patiently administers the word through the Spirit in His own good time and way. He uses comments and teaching in Bible studies and prophesying in the assembly along with private study.

*Isaiah 28:9, Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. 10 For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line*

*1Peter 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*

What blessings to the meek and humble soul who loves Him and desires to serve Him. We can’t profitably try to “short-circuit” that process. The result can be someone stumbling and losing ground and perhaps picking up some resentment against the one who stumbled him.

We may have strong feelings and opinions about some things. If we feel we are strong we may be tempted to impose our knowledge upon others. If we are weak we may have strong feelings and opinions about some things. We may likewise be tempted to impose our knowledge upon others. Neither is our right or privilege. It is not love but often pride at work when we try to impose our will upon others. Coercion is not in God’s “play book.” Leading on the sheep as a shepherd is the Lord’s way of discipling, leading by example as well as instruction. If some do seek to impose their knowledge or conscience upon others it is a divisive act, destructive of souls and ultimately of the local assembly itself. Such are to be avoided, and if persistent to be rebuked.

*16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. See also Titus 3:10.*

Our taste of liberty may tempt us into taking it as license (permission) to do anything we please. NOT! Obviously acts and thoughts that are sin are well defined

in scripture. But there is an additional constraint upon our conduct, the well being of the other believers surrounding us. We are further restrained sometimes by the consciences of those “weaker” than we. I am to avoid engaging in conduct that will stumble another less knowledgeable than myself, even though it is perfectly upright in itself.

*For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

Would we carelessly destroy another for the sake of some food or drink we wish to indulge in? Some recreation we enjoy? Is there righteousness, love, peace, joy, in our lives or do we do things against our own conscience? Do we have a bad conscience about doing them but do them anyway because of our supposed liberty to do so?

*He that doubts is condemned*

*Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*

Christ bore our condemnation, our sins, on the cross. Our lives are to be lived in faith. In love for the Lord. And in love for others, not satisfying our desires through acts, not sinful in themselves, that might stumble others.

Pray for wisdom beginning each day. Think about the Lord as we go through the day. Pray again if any doubts come into our hearts, even if we are simply eating something good. It may be the Spirit working upon our conscience in order to protect another, or even ourselves. More serious things such as intoxicating beverages, places we go, recreation, choices of music or entertainment, companions, etc. may lead others astray. Would you do that or go there with Jesus along? (WWJD)

By Ron Canner, February 20, 2008