

An old manuscript  
on Woe unto the world because  
of offences

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Matt: 18ch:7v. "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh"---

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The wisdom that appeared in all our Saviour's discourses while in the world, has been justly celebrated—but there is one circumstance of his ministrations, that perhaps, has come under the observance of but few, that is, his saying and doing every thing in the most seasonable and proper time, -- A remarkable instance of this is given in the ch: preceeding the one from which our text is taken—As it was also absolutely necessary for our Saviour to die for the sins of the world, he receiveth (?) that if this event should take place, and his (?) no previous notice of it, it might prove a stumbling block in their way, which they would be able to surmount---He sees that it was necessary to warn them of the sufferings that awaited him—And yet to have done this before they were convinced, that he was the Messiah would have been premature—they would not have believed such warnings, or they would have stumbled at them, and would have been deterred from following him---Therefore he did not preach his crucifixion, till the most of his disciples were fully persuaded, that he was Christ, the son of the living God—He then informed them that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and Chief Priests and scribes, and be killed and raised again the third day---He seems however to speak sparingly on this subject, until he had given them further discovery of his glory and the glory of the future state in his transfiguration on the mount, but after that glorious scene, he informed them more particularly, that the Son of Man would be betrayed and suffer and die, and after his burial would rise again---This did the Saviour wisely time his discourse, revealing his truth, and declaring the mysteries of his kingdom as they were able to bear it.

But while the wisdom of our Lord is to be admired in selecting the fittest seasons to instruct his disciples, we must also admit that their folly was equally apparent in choosing the most unseasonable times, to display their mistaken views of their master's kingdom.

At the very time Jesus was foretelling(?)...they began to contend for (?)...and to aspire to the highest posts of honor (?) kingdom---in the beginning of this chapter we are informed that at the same time Jesus had been predicting his sufferings, the disciples came to him saying "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven" —By the kingdom of heaven they meant the temporal kingdom that the God of Heaven was about to set up under the Messiah---This they thought would be a temporal kingdom, and their question implied which of us shall obtain the chief dignity or preferment in thy kingdom---

To convince them how little they understood the nature of his kingdom, and the means of acquiring the honors of it, Jesus called a little child to him, and set him in the midst of them, & said "verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children"---Except you turn from such carnal views and desires, & be made holy & simple, humble, teachable, unassuming, & condescending to persons & things, which are reputed mean, being ready to serve all in love—Except ye under the change—so far from being greatest or even great in my kingdom, ye shall not even enter into it—Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven---He that has most humility has most grace, and shall have the most glory---And, says he, whoso shall ~~offend~~ ~~shall cause to stumble~~ receive one such little child in my name receiveth me---But whoso shall offend, ~~and~~ shall cause to stumble, and turn out of the way one of these little ones which believe in me, if were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, & that he were drowned in the depth of the sea---And then on a foresight of the offences, which would be given in future ages, and of the great harm that would be done by them to the best of causes, he exclaimed in the words of our text, "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! This was a caution as Jerome has well observed, particularly necessary for the disciples at this time, striving for superiority: for if they had continued in that spirit, they would have turned out of the way, those they had gained to the faith. In the further investigation of this subject, let us consider,

- I. What is implied by the term "offences"
  - II. How it appears that offences must come
  - III. The evil pronounced upon the world because of offences & upon that man by whom they come—
- I. Offences in this place, mean stumbling blocks in the way that leads to Heaven---the expression is used in a figurative sense—Christianity is represented as a path, and Christians are travelling in that path—And whatever prevents persons from commencing this journey, or prevents their continuance in it, or causes them to turn out of it---is an offence & stumbling block in the way that leads to Heaven—Hence says St. Paul to the Romans "Let us not judge one another but judge this matter, that no man put a stumbling- block, on an occasion to fall in his brothers way—It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

Stumbling blocks are of three kinds—1. They are such as God has laid in the way. 2. They are such as are laid in the way by the Devil and his agents. 3. They are such as laid in the way by the folly, inattention, & misconduct of professions of religion.

1. They are such as God has laid in the way—these however, are only stumbling blocks to those whose minds are blind, whose wills are perverse and who are in a state of darkness, and depravity; unenlightened and unrenewed in heart—and therefore to persons of this description, Jesus Christ himself is a stumbling block—Unto you which believe, he is precious but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient. Many stumble at the Divinity of Christ—they cannot be persuaded that he is God, & because they find him revealed as such in the scriptures, they reject the scriptures, and refuse to acknowledge their divine authenticity—They stumble also at his mysterious incarnation, they cannot comprehend the mysteries connected with it, no more than they can comprehend many of the mysteries of nature, yet they will admit the one & deny the other---

The Jews were offended with our Saviours humiliation and meanness, his exaltation and glory—they were offended with his miracles, and with his doctrines as being too licentious, too strict, too simple, & too mysterious—

2. Stumbling blocks in the second place are such as are laid in the ways by the devil & his agents through God's permission—among these may be reckoned false doctrine. Much has been said and much has been written by men of contrary opinions, on the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, & in many instances truth has been restrained, & warped, & beclouded; ;while falsehood has been patched up with sophistry and superstition, and set up and recommended as coming from the word of God—the watchman's trumpet has given an uncertain sound—some have been called from afar, while others have been left to grope their way down to eternal night—Others have been sent to the fires of purgatory to purify their natures for heaven. Some have been sent down to Jordan to seek that regeneration ~~of heart~~ which is brought in the heart by the Holy Ghost—while some in the boundlessness of their philanthropy have unconditionally elected the whole of the human family to heaven,—the truth & justice of God to the contrary notwithstanding. And in their zeal and prejudices, men have frequently left the standard of truth, and established their principles ~~from~~ on the specious notions and opinions of men—And ~~which~~ many have virtually subscribed to doctrines and sentiments, contrary to their own private views, and apprehensions of scripture, merely to gratify coincide with a particular sect or denomination, or to be associated in membership with particular individuals, for whom they entertained previous regard an attachment—Many, on this account have been led into labyrinths of inconsistency, from which they are unable to extricate themselves, at least so far, as the influence of their example on society is concerned—We believe this practice to be wrong in the sight of God, and in the sight of consistency—Let us

illustrate this point by the supposition of a familiar circumstance—suppose two gentlemen were to offer to represent this country in the legislature—the politics of one are thought to be contrary to the principles of our constitution, and to the interest of the community—tho as an individual, let it be granted that he is intelligent and honest. The other is a man equally honest, sincere, and intelligent,—his politics more consistent and more adapted to the interest of the people—Nevertheless an individual comes forward and votes for the first mentioned gentleman and alleges the following reason—altho his politics are exceptionable, and contrary to the interest of the people, and our established constitution, yet I find him a kind and obeying neighbor, a worthy and useful citizen and a polished gentleman, therefore I must support his election. Could such an individual be considered a consistent man, or a patriotic citizen—can it be supposed that such a case can, or ever will occur among intelligent people. And shall we be more consistent & careful in securing & maintaining the rights of our country, than in maintaining and establishing the principles and doctrines of our holy religion?—on this subject our present, future, and eternal salvation deprived—and the conduct of future generations may be affected by the principles and doctrines to which we subscribe—By the stand ~~we~~ persons take in this ~~subject~~ matter, they generally determine the course of their children, and their children's children---We believe it to be the duty of every individual professing godliness to attach themselves, to some branch of Christ's visible Church although this is not apested in the Bible in so many words, yet this much is anticipated throughout the scriptures, and if it be the privilege of our individual to neglect this duty it is equally the privilege of all—and in a short time there would be no church at all, which is entirely contrary to the anticipation of the scriptures.

And while various branches compare one generally church, it is equally the duty of every individual to lay aside prejudice, and education, convenience and inclination, and take up the word of God which is truth, ~~and make that salvation which our judgment shall dictate and by that~~ and examine the doctrines, and discipline, and privileges, and peculiarities of the different branches of Christ's Church, and then make the selection which our judgment shall dictate, and to whose doctrines, and discipline, and usages, we can most conscientiously subscribe—Altho' we may pursue a different course without sustaining ~~any~~ injury ourselves yet our example may influence others to pursue a similar course, and an error in principle with them may lead to an error in practice. We would not judge for any individual on this subject nor would we by any means recommend any particular denomination to the exclusion of another. But we would recommend the course above mentioned ~~before~~ previous to joining the church of God, "For it is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or made weak, let us not therefore judge one another any more, but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."

There are other stumbling blocks arising from the same source which frequently disturb and agitate the Church—such as things or persons, exciting strife and contention, divisions, parties, and sects---Our unfortunate circumstance is frequently so managed by the Devil and his agents as to destroy the peace and harmony of a whole society, animosities have been excited, the love

of many has waxed cold; and instead of shunning the first approach of sin, and forgetting the things that are behind, a little matter has been agitated by misrepresentation, until a little matter fire has kindled a great matter in evil-surmising, whispering, talebearing, jealousy, anger, discord, contention, and strife, have prevailed to the destruction of that charity which suffereth long and is kind, which envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; which doth not behave itself unseemly, seeking not his own, is not easily provoked thinketh no evil; which rejoiceth not in iniquity, but beareth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things—then let us beware, lest we should be the means of agitating unfortunate circumstances, on the doings of individuals to the injury of others, and thereby give an occasion of stumbling & offences, for love to the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! for whose shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck & that he were drowned in the depth of the sea---

Beside things of this kind, men will sometimes arise in the Church, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Many good men, useful in the Church & lovers of Zion, have been led into error by their own mistaken views and disappointed attempts. They have left the paths of experiences to try the wilderness of doubt and uncertainty; and have been brought to lament their own folly—

Others have been turned aside to favor their schemes—Divisions, parties, & sects have been set up, and strife and contention have been excited; and we have no kind of doubt but many have destroyed their own usefulness in this way, and kept thousands from the church of God, and even from embracing religion—How solemn the responsibility, to sever those ties of love affection, which have been made by the Holy Ghost, and strengthened & cultivated in the bosom of the same Church, and bound together by the same reciprocal feelings and by the promotion of the same common interests—How dangerous to be the means of exciting strife, and alienation of affection, & raising stumbling blocks, at the expense of such sacred bonds; and we would beseech you to learn lessons of experience from the inconsiderate and unadvised course of many who have gone before you.

Learn the important lesson enjoined by the Apostle Paul—“I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them—

False doctrine—Strife, contention, & divisions---Threatenings and persecution----These and similar things are contrived and brought about by the Devil and his agents to afflict the church of God , and to prevent persons from attempting the Christian life.

3. Stumbling blocks of the third kind are those laid in the way by the folly, weakness, & misconduct of professors of religion—occasion is taken against them from their folly; when they speak an act unwisely and expose themselves to ridicule—There is a certain dignity and gravity that should ever characterize those who have the fear of God before their eyes; which will ensure them respect with the intelligent & the polite and put gainsayers to silence—

Others give occasion of stumbling by their weakness—they are easily turned aside from their duties by self indulgence, indolence and sloth—they are carried down the stream of iniquity by their passion & appetites. There are others who give occasion of stumbling by their misconduct—want of sobriety, injustice—over-reaching—unfair dealing, contracting debts and not endeavoring to repay them—failure in business through extravagance—and culpable neglect—from the want of veracity and punctuality—not attending to truth and engagement—

From unmercifulness when they seek revenge—from pride as manifested in dress, furniture, & equipage, and a variety of other sinful indulgences, and omissions of duty—and we believe that the misconduct of professors of religion, has done more injury to the cause of Christ than all the other evils that abound in the world.

Were the professors of religion to do their duty, and exhibit that conduct which becomes their high profession---Christianity would prevail like a sweeping torrent, infidelity would be put to silence—Idolatry would be made ashamed, the Devil would be confounded, and the earth would be washed of its impurities—O for that example that speaks louder than profession!

We shall notice

#### II—How it appears that offences must come

1. Christ and his doctrine must be what they are—these are only stumbling blocks in our apprehension—In reality, they are helps, and they that stumble at these stumble at their own salvation & privileges
2. Offences of the second kind not strictly speaking of necessity, but in the nature of things—For the Devil and his agents will hate the people of God, and persecute them as far and as often as they are permitted.

---And God will permit them to go a certain length, to manifest their own wickedness & for the trial and purification of his people. “For there must be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.” For I know, says the Apostle, that after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among, not sharing the flock—Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them---

3. Offences of the third kind will come as appears from the words of the text, woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh—He does not appoint or ordain these offences—nor does he withhold whereby they may be avoided, But he permits or does not absolutely hinder them—

We notice---

- III. The evil pronounced upon the world because of offences, & upon that man by whom they come---

“Woe to the world”—By the world may be here meant those that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the offences above mentioned, & especially of the last mentioned kind, many of these perish eternally---they become prejudiced against the ways of God—they grieve the Holy Spirit—harden their hearts and stiffen their necks, and at last they fall short of heaven & fall into hell which they might have escaped. Miserable are they and miserable shall they be to all eternity.

The world here may mean mankind in general, including ~~professors of religion~~ the people of God---much evil will occur to the world because of the stumbling blocks which beset our way---Many weak Christians will be turned out of the way, and miss of heaven, & loose their souls forever.

2. But woe to that man by whom they cometh---He who who may be the means of placing stumbling blocks in the way of others---Whether by stirring up strife or by misconduct and thus leading them from the paths of righteous into the ways of transgression will have to bear their iniquity at the bar of God.