

Stumbling

The apostle Peter brings to mind a condition we acquired in childhood, physically, and one that advances as we mature, spiritually. That condition is one of "falling" or "stumbling" (2 Pet. 1:10).

We are all aware of our younger years when we "stubbed our toes," a painful and lasting experience that seemed to come too often and carry with it a sense of embarrassment because we tripped on something or simply weren't paying attention to where we were going. The matter of "falling" or "stumbling" spiritually is also a concept repeatedly stated in the scriptures.

The apostle Paul, having identified Israel's repeated stumbling, warns all subsequent generations to "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). To take heed is "to 'look' at (lit. or fig.): behold, beware, lie, look (on, to), perceive, regard, see, sight, take heed" (Strongs). Simply put, if we do not watch where we're going...we will fall.

Jesus addressed this issue in a couple of different ways: "If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him" (Jn. 11:9-10). This is a very basic principle that was applied to spiritual consequences: "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12). When we stumble spiritually, it is because we failed to walk in the light.

The Lord addressed the issue from the standpoint of being the cause of one stumbling when he said, "It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones (kjb)" (Lk. 17:1-2). The terms "offences" and "offend" refer to "a trap-stick, i.e. snare (fig. cause of displeasure or sin): occasion to fall (of stumbling), offence, thing that offends, stumblingblock" (Strongs).

When James addressed the issue, he did so under the context of self-control, by stating, "For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body (kjb)" (Jas. 3:2).

But as we are all subject to falling or stumbling we are well aware of the dangers of so doing. We do not set out to stumble, physically or spiritually, but we do none-the-less. Physically, we must keep an eye on the path before us: avoid the potholes; rocks; and various other types of obstacles. Then, when we "think we stand", we allow our attention to be deflected for just a moment and we fall. The same is true spiritually: We follow the direction of the Psalmist: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (119:105). We endeavor to "walk in the light, as he is in the light" (1 Jn. 1:7). We "think we stand" in a secure position and then something in the world deflects our attention, for just a moment, and we fall. And with that fall comes pain, embarrassment, shame, and the process of returning to our original state.

Not only is there a danger of falling in reference to our actions but there is also a danger of falling in doctrine, due to the wiles of the devil and the deceitfulness of men. Having addressed the subject of the Lord's return and the efforts of scoffers to undermine the faith, Peter warned the brethren saying, "beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness" (2 Pet. 3:1-18).

What a picture it paints! What are we to do? Is there no way we can overcome the stumbling-blocks of life?

That is what we want to learn from Peter. Here is a man who walked with the Lord, heard the words of life, and affirmed, regarding Jesus, that "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). To this man, the Lord said, "Get thee behind me Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou mindeth not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matt. 16:23). This man who said to the Lord, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended," and that said, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." (Matt. 26:33, 35), and not twelve hours thence, said, "I do not know the man...And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly" (Matt. 26:72,75).

To the child of God who stumbles, he says, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart shall be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22). To those to whom he warned about the possibility of falling "from your own steadfastness," he said, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:17-18). This we can do, but it requires that all individuals "give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Peter 1:10).

If you desire "an entrance...into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11), that entrance will be abundantly supplied if you with "all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; And to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound...if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble:" (2 Pet. 1:5-10) ret