



Zionophobia: Responsibility to Communicate Truth; Destiny of Those Who Cause Children to Stumble with Verbal Traps; Etymology of “Skandalizo,” Matt 18:5-6

1. The Lord is trying to persuade the disciples to examine their disposition. Their self-absorption is preventing them from having the humility necessary to communicate truth.
2. The Lord’s disposition on the cross will reflect total humility as He submits Himself as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the entire world.
3. Those who believe in Him must have humility in order to be persuaded that this sacrifice is sufficient for forgiveness of sins, salvation of their souls, and imputation of eternal life.
4. Teachers must demonstrate humility in their dealings with children which can be extended by application to everyone they encounter. Occupation with Christ enables the teacher to take seriously the responsibility he has toward the tender soul of a child and to deal with him in the same humility by which the child brings his free will.
5. Failure to approach a child with such humility would eventually cause the teacher to take advantage of the child’s innocence by indoctrinating him into his personal worldview.
6. That hidden agenda can take many forms but the intent is to recruit unsuspecting children into placing their confidence in an ideology, a philosophy, or a theology that is in direct opposition to the truth of Scripture.
7. Thus the Lord begins to issue solemn and sober warnings of severe judgment upon those who would communicate the lie to an unsuspecting child.

Matthew 18:6 - Whoever causes one of these little ones who believes in Me to be lured into a trap, it would be better for him that an upper millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned far out in the deepest part of the sea.

8. This passage is directed toward anyone who would abuse a child in any way. This abuse could be physical in at least three ways:
 - Sexually molesting the child,
 - willful neglect of the child by depriving him of proper hygiene, diet, clothing, nurturing, and, most especially, parental love which includes both benevolence, characterized by kindness, gentleness, and clemency, and severity characterized by a willingness to punish, discipline, and correct, or
 - inflicting unreasonable, unjustified, or brutal bodily harm.
9. Child abuse can also be inflicted mentally as well:



- A child can be confused due to unclear direction, become stirred to anger, and become embittered. (Colossians 3:21)
- A child can be disheartened by harsh and demeaning words that destroy his self-confidence. (Proverbs 15:4)
- A child can be unwittingly deluded by means of the lie by adults who knowingly seek to capture the child's soul for their own nefarious purposes. (1 Timothy 4:1-2; 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-15; 1 Peter 5:8; Matthew 7:15; 10:16; Colossians 2:8; Romans 12:2; John 8:44; 8:31-32)

10. The word in Matthew 18:6 that refers to all of these abuses is translated “offend” in the King James, “to sin” in the NIV, and “to stumble” in the NASB. The Greek word is:

σκανδαλίζω, skandalizō - “to cause to fall, to ruin.” Its meaning in the Classical Greek is helpful in understanding its use in our context:

Liddell, Henry George and Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. Revised by Henry Stuart Jones. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), 1604:

σκανδάλη [skandalē]: A stick in a trap on which the bait is placed, and which, when touched by the animal, springs up and shuts the trap. Metaphorically, setting word-traps, i.e., throwing out words which one's adversary will catch at, and so be caught himself. To cause to stumble or be made to stumble.

11. This metaphorical meaning is being used by our Lord as He warns the disciples to beware of saying anything to a child that would cause him to go astray. Amplification on this usage is provided by:

Friedrich, Gerhard (ed.). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 7:339-40:

σκάνδαλον, skandalon; σκανδαλίζω, skandalizō. The stick in a trap. Used metaphorically in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* \a-kar' ni-anz\, 676-691:

We the veterans blame the City.
 Is it meet and right that we,
 Who of old, in manhood's vigor,
 fought your battles on the sea,
 Should in age be left untended,
 yea exposed to shame and ill?
 Is it right to let the youngsters
 air their pert forensic skill.
 Grappling us with writs and warrants,
 holding up our age to scorn?
 We who now have lost our music,
 feeble nothings, dull, forlorn,
 We whose only “Safe Poseidon”
 is the staff we lean upon,
 There we stand, decayed and muttering,
 hard beside the Court-house Stone,
 Nought discerning all around us
 save the darkness of our case.
 Comes the youngster, who has compassed
 for himself the accuser's place,



Slings his tight and nipping phrases
 tackling us with legal scraps,
 Pulls us up and cross-examines,
setting little verbal traps, (687)
 Rends and rattles old Tithonus
 till the man is dazed and blind;
 Till with toothless gums he mumbles,
 then departs condemned and fined;
 Sobbing, weeping, as he passes,
 to his friends he murmurs low,
 "All I've saved to buy a coffin
 now to pay the fine must go."

NOTE: The phrase "setting little verbal traps" at line 687 reads in the Greek: **ἐποῖται σκανδάλῃθρ' ἱστὰς ἐπῶν**, **epōtai skandalēthr histas epōn**: "he sets traps with his questions." This is verbal prestidigitation used to trick the old man into a confession in order to get his last dime.

Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 7:345:

The noun *skandalon* [a word-trap] is an obstacle in coming to faith and a cause of going astray. The force of the verb *skandalizō* is even stronger than that of the noun *skandalon* in the New Testament. Whereas *skandalon* is only an "occasion of falling" which might lead to a fall or not, *skandalizō* is the causing of a fall.

12. The word *skandalon* entered the English language and became first "slander" then "scandal." Details of its etymology are provided by:

The Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories. (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1991), 430-31:

Slander. *Slander* and *scandal* can be considered stumbling blocks over which a person's reputation or career may fall. The etymology of these doublets [one of two or more words in the same language derived by different routes of transmission from the same source. [M-WCD, 11th ed.]] bear this out.

The ancient Greeks used the word *skandalon* to denote 'a trap or stumbling block.' This word was taken into Late Latin as *scandalum* with essentially the same meaning but with application to one's moral state. It denoted a stumbling block causing one to fall into sin. Old French took the word as *esclandre*, which was also variously spelled *escandle* and *esclande*. When the word was borrowed into the Middle English, it was spelled *sclaundre*, *sclandre*, and *slaundre*. By the seventeenth century *slander* had become the standard form. It was used to mean 'utterance of false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage reputation.' It also referred to 'malicious publication by speech of false tales or suggestions to the injury of another.' This is the usual sense of the word today, and it is contrasted in legal use with the sense of libel that refers to the defamation of a person by written means.

In the sixteenth century the need was felt for a word whose meaning more closely paralleled that of the Late Latin word *scandalum*, and so the word *scandal* was formed. The earliest attested use of *scandal* refers to the discredit to religion brought about by a religious person's 'stumbling' into sin. It also was used for 'a stumbling block to the reception of the faith or obedience to divine law.'



13. So in the Greek, the Latin, the French, and the English the definition of the Greek noun *skandalon* carries the concept of “causing someone to go astray.”
14. In Matthew 18 the word carries the concept of delegated responsibility assigned to adults, especially parents, with regard to their children’s souls. No adult is allowed to use verbal prestidigitation to create an obstacle to a child’s faith in the truth and thus cause him to go astray.
15. The emphasis is on the Gospel of salvation but the principle applies to all areas of divine truth.
16. Adults who propagandize children into placing their faith in panaceas, ideologies, philosophies, or religious dogmas so that they are deluded from believing the truth are subject to the punishments revealed in this passage.
17. Deluding a child with regard to establishment principles falls under the condemnation found in this passage.
18. Our nation’s obsession with removing biblical principles which teach traditional ethics and values from the classroom is producing generations of children with no moral core.