

42 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me **to sin** [*skandalizo* = stumble/offen], it would be better for him if a great [donkey] millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand **causes you to sin**, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire. ... 45 And if your foot **causes you to sin**, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna. ... 47 And if your eye **causes you to sin**, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, 48 where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.

The word "**scandal**" has its roots in the Greek word **σκανδαλον** (*skandalon*), which originally referred to a **trap** or **snare**. Over time, it came to mean a stumbling block or something that causes someone to **stumble** or **fall**, both physically and metaphorically. This word and its forms are used 29 times in the New Testament. And in today's gospel alone it is mentioned 4 times.

Here's a brief breakdown of the word's etymology:

Greek Origins:

- **σκανδαλον** (*skandalon*): In **classical Greek**, *skandalon* meant a **trap**, particularly the trigger or **spring mechanism** that caused the trap to close. Figuratively, it came to refer to anything that **causes someone to stumble** or **fall into error**.

Latin Adaptation:

- From Greek, the word passed into **Latin** as **scandalum**, keeping the meaning of a **stumbling block** or **cause of moral failure**. In Christian usage, **scandalum** came to refer specifically to anything that led someone into **sin** or caused **spiritual harm**.

In today's world, it is not uncommon to encounter a cultural shift where many people no longer accept or recognize the concept of **scandal** in the way it has been traditionally understood. This reality can be attributed to several factors, such as **moral relativism**, **secularization**, and the **desensitization** to immoral behavior through media and social norms. However, from a **Catholic perspective**, scandal remains a serious issue because of its ability to **lead others into sin** and cause **spiritual harm**.

1. Moral Relativism

Modern society often embraces **moral relativism**, where moral truths are seen as subjective and dependent on individual or cultural preferences. This challenges the traditional understanding of right and wrong. As a result, scandal—especially in its moral sense—can lose its significance.

Yet, **Scripture** teaches that morality is **objective** and that God's law is universal:

- **Isaiah 5:20** warns: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" The loss of a clear sense of **right and wrong** in modern society can lead people to **moral confusion**, making it harder for them to recognize scandal for what it truly is.

2. Desensitization

Constant exposure to morally questionable content in media and entertainment can lead to **desensitization**. What was once considered **shocking** or **scandalous** might now be viewed as **normal** or acceptable. As sin becomes trivialized, the notion of scandal diminishes.

Jesus, however, strongly warns against **scandal**, especially when it leads others into sin:

- **Matthew 18:6**: “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” This harsh warning highlights the gravity of causing scandal, especially to those who are **vulnerable** in their faith.

3. Secularization

With the growing secularization of many societies, **religion** and **faith-based moral principles** often play a smaller role in shaping public life. As fewer people subscribe to an **absolute standard of morality**, the concept of scandal, which implies **leading others into sin**, might be dismissed as outdated or unnecessary.

However, as **Saint Augustine** reminds us:

- “Right is right even if no one is doing it; wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it.” The truth of God’s moral law does not change with public opinion. Scandal, therefore, remains a **moral evil**, regardless of how widely it is accepted or ignored in society.

4. Changing Social Norms

The **moral landscape** of many societies has shifted dramatically, particularly in areas like **sexual morality**, **family life**, and **public behavior**. Practices once seen as **immoral** or **scandalous**—such as cohabitation or divorce—are now widely accepted. This normalization of what was once considered sinful makes it more difficult to recognize when a scandal is occurring.

In contrast, **Saint John Paul II** called Christians to stand firm in the face of changing norms:

- “Do not be afraid to take a stand for truth, even if it means being a sign of contradiction.” Scandal arises when we conform to the world’s standards rather than God’s, thus leading others into **error** or **confusion** about what is right and good.

5. Loss of the Sense of Sin

Pope Pius XII famously stated, “The greatest sin today is that men have lost the sense of sin.” This loss of awareness regarding sin diminishes the recognition of **scandal**, as society often downplays the seriousness of actions that offend God.

The **Book of Proverbs** reminds us:

- **Proverbs 14:12**: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” Even when sin seems **harmless** or **acceptable** in the eyes of the world, it can still lead to **spiritual ruin**, making the issue of scandal even more critical.

6. Catholic Teaching on Scandal

From a **Catholic perspective**, scandal is not merely about public offense; it is about **leading others into sin**. The **Catechism of the Catholic Church** explains:

- **CCC 2284**: “Scandal is an attitude or behavior which leads another to do evil. The person who gives scandal becomes his neighbor’s tempter. He damages virtue and integrity; he may even draw his brother into spiritual death.” This teaching highlights the **moral responsibility** each person has for their actions, particularly those in positions of influence or authority, and the **spiritual consequences** that can arise from causing scandal.

Conclusion:

While many in the modern world may no longer acknowledge the concept of **scandal**, this does not negate its **moral reality** from a **Catholic viewpoint**. As followers of Christ, we are called to uphold **God’s truth** and live in a way that reflects the **love of Christ** without leading others into moral confusion. As **Jesus** reminds us, the consequences of scandal are serious, and our actions must reflect the **holiness** and **integrity** to which we are called. May we strive to live by the words of **Saint Francis of Assisi**:

- “Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words.”

In doing so, we avoid scandal and become true witnesses to the love and truth of God.