

The Stumbling Stone

Romans 9: 30-33

“³⁰ What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. ³² Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. ³³ As it is written: “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.””

Have you ever stumbled over you own feet? I have, far too many times. As I have aged, I have more than once, stumbled over my own feet just trying to walk from here to there. Many of you know what I mean. Walking along, minding my own business, and then all of a sudden, Opps, I was almost on my face.

Illustration: In Leadership Magazine, -Vol. 18,#1, there is a story about Dani Tyler. *Dani Tyler, was a third baseman for the U.S. women's Olympic softball team. One day she hit a home run, or so she thought. In her excitement rounding the bases, she accidentally stepped over home plate. The umpire disallowed the run. Because of that one misstep, the U.S. team lost in extra innings 2-1, only their second international loss in 10 years. The next evening, Tyler played well and paid attention to every step.*

Sports Illustrated writer Peter King, (8/12/96) asked her why the mistake hadn't seemed to become a mental ball-and-chain. She replied, ***“Well, I didn't want to get out of bed this morning,”*** she admitted. ***“But this is sports. One play doesn't make a game, and one play won't define my life. I've never been the best athlete, but I try to have the best attitude and work the hardest. What happened was a freak thing. It's over. If I whine about it, or make excuses, or argue, what happens? I look like a jerk.”***

When we stumble, we often find that there is little we can do to change that fact, so, no need to make excuses, or argue about it, simply take it in stride, and do what needs to be done. Go on with Life!

Israel stumbled, and did so in a big way, which cost them dearly.

Let's take a closer look...

First - Righteousness by faith

“³⁰ What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal.”

As Paul address the true reasoning for why the Jews are being rejected, and the Gentiles accepted, we discover what must be a part of every believing child of God. ***The difference was in the way they were seeking Christ.*** Paul begins by mentioning that the Gentiles, weren't pursuing forgiveness. Something they needed but had not understood. Does that speak of this world right now?

Now, as the message of God's grace came to them, and as they accepted it - BY FAITH - they began walking in it. Thus, He gave them the understanding they needed. As they needed it.

In ministry today, there are those who are trained to do ministry, and then there are those who are called to do ministry. It is really powerful when the two come together!

A ***"righteousness by faith,"*** as Paul calls it, is not about changing to the Jewish religion, or, any other religious practices, for that matter. It does not come by submitting to ceremonial law, although many tried to do that. ***"Righteousness by faith"*** comes by embracing Christ for themselves. By believing in His Word and submitting to the Gospel of Christ in their daily walk. Total submission is not easy for many, but it is totally necessary. The Gentiles were given this opportunity. Living by "righteousness," a ***"righteousness by faith in Christ."***

It's kind of like -

Illustration:

The first day you walk into a new school... How do you feel?

The first day at your new job... How do you feel?

The first time you drove the car, by yourself. How do you feel?

You are eager, wanting, ready, to do whatever we are told to do to get where we need to be. Why? Because you want the end result. The position, the pay, as well as possessing the knowledge and discovering our place in life so we can improve our lives for Christ. Be a better person. This is what it is like as we walk in ***"righteousness by faith."*** We listen, we hang on every word, we seek for a better understanding, we want everything God has to offer us, as it is important to do what the Lord asks of us so as we become what He created us to become.

Secondly - They stumbled...

"Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone." ROM 9:32

The Jews knew God, yet, they did not understand how to get to Him. Therefore, missed Him in the end. They sought Him by the works, and found that, that way was lacking. Not that works are wrong, they should be the results of faith. They stumbled in their lack of understanding.

They expected justification by their observance of the laws. Trying to observe the various ceremonies that Moses had instituted, after all, ***thats how it had always been done.***

Consequently, God became a ***"stumbling stone,"*** at which they stumbled. They fell flat on their faces. (So, to speak) The law was given to them for one reason, to be obedient to it, even if it hurt, or seemed impossible. Grace, was not something they understood, nor do many today.

We obey the Law because of our faith, not in spite of it! The only thing they knew was to try and live in strict obedience, and thus they expected to be justified by the Law, not by Grace.

Written In God's letter to us, we will find that without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, it matters not how obedient we are to the law, it will not, it cannot, save us.

It can help us maintain the kind of life we seek, but it cannot save us. Thus, Christ Himself, becomes a **“stumbling stone,”** by which many men stumble. Consequently, people are afraid to expose themselves to Christ as they need to, as some want to., for fear that He will see them as flawed, sinful. So they walk away from Him, thinking they are hiding from God by not coming to Him face to face. How sad!

We read in Isaiah, *“and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem, he will be a trap and a snare.”* ISA 8:14 The truth is, we are not always open and honest with Him. **Later in Isaiah we also read,**

“So, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed.” ISA 28:16

If we truly discover the Grace of God, the JOY of living for Him, we dare not stay trapped in the life we may find ourselves in right now. We should let God have our lives completely. Trust Him!

Paul repeats this same statement in Romans...

“As it is written: “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” ROM 9:33 Trust Him and you will never be put to shame. Paul’s perspective is different, yet, the same truth...

Which brings me to the last point,

Third - Is Christ your stumbling stone, or, your Cornerstone?

God knew, and spoke through men, such as Paul, so that the rest of us would come to the point of face-to-face confrontation with Jesus Christ. That we would make a choice. Discover a point in time, where a decision has to be made. Yet, far too many people avoid making that decision, for whatever reason(s).

What many seem to see, is what they have to give up by accepting Him as Lord, and that becomes an obstacle. Holding on to the worldly treasures, the momentary pleasures, the rusting, decay things of this world. Things some consider them as **“treasurers”** something **“valuable.”** It is because of their perspective. They see Christ as a **“stumbling stone”** **because we often hold on to things which will fade away in time.** Thinking, I can’t give that up. I can’t follow Him because it will cost me everything. I am not ready to give up this or that, to be a follower of Christ. Which brings to mind a few questions to mind, **“When will be ready?”** and **“Is Christ a “stumbling stone” for us because we seem to procrastinate?”**

Then there is the Cornerstone.

If you look up the definition of a **“cornerstone,”** you will find a few different ideas.

1) a stone in the exterior of a large and important building; usually carved with a date and laid with appropriate ceremonies.

2) a stone at the outer corner of two intersecting masonry walls.

3) lowest support of a structure.

I would like to try and combine the three definitions in an effort to help us discover what it means to have Christ as our Cornerstone.

First - When we are faced with the choices.

We need to recognize what His purpose, "Christ's purpose" is within our lives. Jesus Himself told us, that He came not to condemn, or destroy us, rather to save us. His teaching speaks of building a new Life, a New Self, and the old self is no more. We are NEW creatures in Christ! Once we accept Him, we begin a whole new life!

Second - God's Word speaks of His ever-present, presence.

- He would never leave us or forsake us.
 - That He would write upon our hearts His commands which we need to live by.
 - That He is our only hope for seeing God, and living with Him forever.
- Keep in mind that He promised, ***He will never leave us or forsake us!*** Ever!

If these statements are truth, then it appears to me, that no matter what we must give up, in the end, it will be worth it.

He is our "***Cornerstone...***" and that means:

(1) His name is carved deep into our souls and should be seen from the outside.

That Christ, is this strength within me set in place by God. Written upon our hearts. He becomes an essential part of who we are.

(2) Jesus becomes the very stone upon which our house is built.

When we leave the world behind us, we stand in faith upon Christ. We live on what He tells us. What he reveals to us. At that point in our lives, He is our ***Cornerstone, Jesus Christ.*** Everything we do, everything we are, everything we become, is formed upon Him and His teaching. For ourselves and for our families.

(3) That Jesus is our foundation. That means the rock upon which our lives are built.

That without His love and grace as our foundation, our houses will fall, as many have when the storms of life come, and they do come. So, we are to stand in FAITH, trusting Him.

So here is the most important question of this day:

"In your life, is Christ the "stumbling stone," or, a "Cornerstone?"

Illustration:

Back in the days when the Old West was being settled, there were a lot of pioneers who made their way over the Oregon trail. When they got to the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains, they found a stream a little too wide to cross in one step. So, they did the "two-stepped" across it by using an ugly lump, sticking up out of the water in the middle of the stream.

As the years passed, other pioneers settled in the area, built their cabins, strung fences and

plowed fields. One man built his cabin near that same stream. But he had a problem -- his door kept flapping in the wind. To solve his problem, he remembered that heavy lump in the middle of the stream. So, he carried it to his front step and it became a door stop.

More years passed. Railroads were built across the nation, more people pushed west and modern cities sprang up. A nephew of the old pioneer went east to study geology at a large university. He returned home during vacation. Lo and behold, on the front porch of his uncle's cabin, by the stream, he found not just an ugly lump, not just a heavy lump, but a lump of pure gold, the largest gold nugget ever discovered on the eastern slopes of the Rockies! It had been there for three generations, but everybody saw it in a different light. Some it as an ugly lump, some as a heavy lump, but only the nephew saw it for what it really was -- a lump of pure gold.

*The same thing is true of Jesus. The same Jesus whom others have seen as **a stumbling stone** was actually **a very precious stone** -- **the chief cornerstone**. That is what Jesus Christ is to God's building, the church. The whole building, the body of Christ, is tied together because of the cornerstone.*

"You are, members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord." (Ephesians 2:19-21)

God said, **"Upon this rock I will build my church!"** That ROCK is within our hearts when we accept Jesus as Lord. Have you accepted Him? I pray so!

Close in prayer...