

Wrong Way

Turning to the Right Righteousness

August 15, 2021

Today we're talking about turning from *our own way* and truly owning the *One and only way*.

But before we get to *that*, ask yourself *this*:



Has Jesus ever made you stumble? Because, in Romans, chapter nine, Paul weaves God's OT Words together, and writes:

"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 [Jesus] will never be put to shame." – Romans 9:33 NIV

[Because *Isaiah* wrote] "I lay in Zion a stone for a *foundation*, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a *sure foundation*; whoever believes will *not act hastily*." – Isaiah 28:16 NKJ

[Having *previously* written] [The Lord of hosts] *will* be as a *sanctuary*, but a *foundation* *Stone of stumbling* and a *Rock [of salvation]* of *offense* to both the houses of [Israel] ... and many among them shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken, – Isaiah 8:13-15 NKJ

For *no* one can lay *any foundation* other than the *one* already laid, which *is* Jesus Christ. [The "*Rock of our Salvation*" according to Psalm 95:1] – 1 Corinthians 3:11 NIV

So what's it mean to stumble over and be broken by Jesus? Here's what Paul has in mind:



[The Israelites] are zealous for God, *but* their *zeal* is not *based on knowledge*. Since they did not know the *righteousness* that comes from God and sought to *establish* their *own*, they did not submit to *God's righteousness*. – Romans 10:1-4 NIV



So *we* need to practice the *right* righteousness. The *one* that makes us *holy*.

For by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are *being made holy*. – Hebrews 10:14 NIV

We've discussed life's great joy, when children mature, and mother-or-father and daughter-or-son go above and beyond being parent-and-child, and become *friends*. Well, the more we practice the *right* righteousness, the more *intimately* we'll walk with God. Like a mature child-friend, **our appreciation deepens for what happened when we couldn't comprehend it.**

To be *born* of God – or "*born again*" – is a *beginning*. **You're either a child of God or you're not.** Whereas being *made holy* is a journey, because **friendship grows and changes and matures.**

As a believer, **you can't become more of God's child; but you can become a much better friend.**

[Now] If you *know* that *He* is righteous, you may be *sure* that *everyone* who practices righteousness [“those who are being made holy” (Heb 10:14b)] *has been born* [again] of *Him*. [‘Cause we’re talking about practice] – 1 John 2:29 ESV

No one *born* of *God* makes a practice of sinning ... he cannot keep on sinning [callously] ... By this it is evident who are the children of *God*, and who are the children of the *devil*: whoever does *not* practice righteousness is *not* [born] of *God*, nor is the one who does *not* love his brother. [‘Cause we’re talking about practice] – 1 John 3:9-10 ESV

Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as *He* is righteous. [“For by *one* sacrifice *He has made* perfect forever those who are *being made holy*” (Heb 10:14)] Whoever makes a practice of sinning is [still an un-reborn child (1 Jn 3:10; Jn 8:34)] of the devil, [‘Cause we’re talking about practice] – 1 John 3:6-8 ESV

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you [“who are being made holy” (Heb 10:14b)] may *not* *sin*. [‘Cause we’re talking about practice] But if anyone *does* *sin*, we [“who are being made holy” (Heb 10:14b)] have an *Advocate* with the Father, Jesus Christ *the* Righteous. [‘Cause we’re talking about our *Savior!*] – 1 John 2:1 ESV

Did you know that Scripture says that “truth fails”? Under certain conditions. We’re wired to see things the way we *want* even when it’s *wrong*. It’s called **Confirmation Bias**. It’s a tendency to see everything as confirmation of our existing beliefs. So **if we enter the Word of Truth to support a feeling, desire, or agenda – rather than to seek the truth – we’ll find the proof we need to believe as we want**. And that *blinds* us to *truth* and makes us a *prey* for false teachers.

[Because] No one calls for *justice*, [lit. *righteousness*] nor does any *plead* for *truth*. [Because they think they have it, *because*] They trust in *empty words* ... [And when *that* happens] We *look* for *light*, but there is *darkness!* For *brightness*, but we *walk* in *blackness!* ... For truth is fallen in the street, and *equity* [lit. *right things*] cannot *enter* [our heart]. So *truth fails*, and he who departs from evil makes himself a *prey*. [Unless they stand on the Rock and walk in the light!] – Isaiah 59:4-15 NKJ



Because **truth fails when it’s mishandled**. And it’s mishandled when we pick and choose what we *want* to read and believe and receive and live by. ‘Cause *we’re* talking about *practice*. And yet so willfully impose their own biased ways on *God’s* Word. Paul said that they *are* zealous for *God*, “but their zeal is not based on knowledge”. It’s *sincere* and *passionate*, but mishandled and misdirected! Paul is quoting Proverbs:

It is not good to have *zeal* without *knowledge*, nor to be *hasty* and *miss* the *way*. A man’s own folly ruins his life, yet his heart *rages* against the *Lord*. [Sound familiar?] – Proverbs 19:2-3 NIV

Ever hear that it doesn’t matter *what* someone believes, as long as they’re *sincere*? Well, I beg to differ. Because I was cruising through Bellingham late one night, years ago, and as I drove through an intersection I noticed that the stoplights were hung *backwards*. I thought: that’s weird. As I shot through the 2nd intersection, same thing! I thought: that could be dangerous; somebody is really stupid. At the 3rd intersection it *hit* me: *I’m* stupid! It’s a one way street!

I slammed on my brakes and skidded sideways into the intersection, heart pounding.

We can sincerely miss the way, with deadly consequences. Until I recognized my *own way* for what it was, I could *only* conclude that Bellingham signal-light guys were idiots! But once I saw the truth behind those lights, and owned my mistake, I turned around so fast I left skid marks! If someone would've thrown a rock at my windshield to get my attention, it would've been a kindness. That's what Jesus does. **Our Rock becomes a road block so we'll hopefully stop and take stock,** so we can have a chance to see if we're heading *toward* the *light* or driving in the dark.

He who trusts in *himself* is a *fool*, [like me in the first two crossroads] but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe. [That's me skidding to a stop in the third!] – Proverbs 28:26 NIV



God gave His Word to His Children. And it did NOT require them to *earn* salvation, but to trust His mercy, so that obedience would flow from joyful gratitude. But **they ended up using His Word to quantify their virtue.** Like we can do. More than once Moses had to remind them that:

It is *not* because of *your* righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess – Deuteronomy 9:6 NIV

And yet they continued to resist a righteousness through faith, and: “Sought to establish their own”. And did you know that we're given a very similar warning in the New Testament?

When the kindness and love of God our Savior *appeared*, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth [for “by *one* sacrifice He has *made* perfect forever” (Heb 10:14a)] and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us [“who are *being made* holy” (Heb 10:14b)] generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having *been justified* by His grace, we might *become* heirs *having* the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to *stress these things*, so that those who *have trusted* in God *may be careful to devote* themselves to *doing* what is *good*. – Titus 3:4-8 NIV

Devoting ourselves to doing what is good is a *response* to God's love and mercy – not a *means* to *get* it. So, **doing good must be rooted in receiving grace.** And the more we receive, the more *our* love can't help but *grow* until **our obedience becomes a byproduct of our gratitude.**



I saw a T-shirt that said: Jesus Loves You! And in small print it said: Then again He loves everybody. The humor plays off our tendency to feel less valuable if we don't somehow stand out from the crowd – **which tempts us to compare ourselves to those we feel free to judge as being beneath us** – which is very dangerous when it comes to our righteousness. For instance, where are you on a scale of 0-10 for righteousness? Two? Three? Four? What if the *devil's* a zero, and Hitler's a one or two? I mean, he's *Hitler*, but he's not the *devil*. **“Hmm. Hitler's a one or two? I guess I'm like a five or six?”** Well, drug pushers who sell to *kids* gotta be like a three or four. I mean, they're *drug pushers*, but they're not *Hitler*. And how about kind-hearted *atheists*, or half-hearted Christians? *They* need a number!



See how we'll eventually and fairly easily get faithful believers to a nine? And if you tithe, and attend church, and pray, and read Scripture, and serve in ministry, you *gotta* be like 9.7 or something. And that's why it's *so* dangerous to drive this direction in the dark! Because, even when you're *trying* to be humble, you can't help but see that you're at the top of that ladder. Truth is, Hitler probably *is* a one or two; and you may well *be* a nine point something. **But the scale isn't 0-10. It's 0-infinity!**

All of a sudden there's not much difference between a one and a nine point something. But until we submit *our* way of establishing righteousness to our Father's way, which is *Jesus* – who *is* the Way, **we'll define our own righteousness in ways that wind up deceiving us rather than driving us to our knees.** Because, if you're a nine point something, what's the big deal? We gotta get it through our thick *cocoon* (as Noah called it last Sunday): **we're profoundly lovable, but completely unacceptable.** And *God's* righteousness serves to reveal our need for a Savior as well as His ongoing work of making us holy. And that's *how* and *why* we stumbled over Christ.

[Jesus asked] "What is the meaning of that which is written: 'The Stone the builders rejected has become the Capstone'? Everyone who falls on that Stone *will* be *broken* to pieces, but he on whom *it* falls will be crushed." – Luke 20:17-18 NIV

There's an old Jewish proverb that says: If a stone falls on a pot, woe to the pot! If a pot falls on a stone woe to the pot! In either case, woe to the pot! **When it's a Stone versus a pot, that Stone's gonna win every time!** And Paul reminds us that:

[God] made *His* light shine in *our* hearts to give us the *light* of the *knowledge* of the glory of God in the face of *Christ*. But we *have* this treasure in jars of *clay* to show that this all-surpassing power is from *God* and *not* from *us*. – 2 Corinthians 4:6-7 NIV



We can never be good enough to provide a righteousness of our own that could be the grounds for our justification before God, because **religion can't save us no matter how zealous we are.**



A few years ago we went to Disneyland. And when we checked into the hotel, I was *zealous* to use the restroom. So I hurried in, and was surprised there were no *urinals*. I went to the end of the stalls to see if they were around the corner. *Nope!* I thought, "*Who* designed this place?!" But as I entered the stall on the far end of the room, another little thought struck. Any guesses?

We're all heading wrong ways in ways we're unaware of. So it's a kindness when the Rock becomes a roadblock, and it's kind of *imperative* that we **seize the moment, slam on the brakes, examine ourselves in the light of God's Word, and make any necessary course-corrections.**

[Because] This is my prayer: **[writes Paul]** that *your* love may abound *more* and *more* in *knowledge* and depth of *insight*, – Philippians 1:9 NIV

'Cause we're talking about practice!