

CHRIST, A STONE OF STUMBLING
1 Peter 2:6-8

Intro: Several things make verse 8, my text, an important verse in Scripture:

- 1) It has to do with Christ, and anything that has to do with Christ is important to us--and to God.
- 2) It is a quotation of an OT verse: Isa. 8:14:
And he shall be for a sanctuary;
but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence
to both the houses of Israel,
for a gin and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
Some things in the NT are different from the OT (i.e., sacrifices), but this speaks of something that is the same in both Testaments.
- 3) This verse is quoted also by the Apostle Paul in the book of Romans:
As it is written,
Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone
and a rock of offence:
and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed
(Rom. 9:31).
All of the verses of Scripture are important. Any verse quoted in the NT is especially important. But for it to be quoted more than once puts it in a special class, emphasizing its importance.
- 4) The verse in Romans emphasizes what the others imply--that this is the way God has ordained that it should be. It is not a mistake, or an illusion that we have, that Christ is a stumblingblock, but God the Father has ordained that it should be that way.

Now let us define the terms "stone of stumbling" and "rock of offence."

The word "stone" was used by Peter in 1 Pet. 2:4, 5, 6, 7, 8. It is the Greek word λίθος. It speaks of a smaller stone, but it can also mean a foundation stone, a cornerstone.

"Rock" is the Greek word πέτρα. It speaks of a large stone, such as a cliff--one that is prominent and massive.

- Both words speak of that which remains the same, is unchanging. In both instances we have the same idea--that this rock and this stone cause people to stumble. It is an obstacle in the way which people cannot get around. The word "offence" gives us our English word scandal. A scandal is
- something which detracts from a person rather than attracting us to that person.

Now it is amazing that these terms speak of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is "a stone of stumbling." He is "a rock of

offence." When people think about God, He, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the One they have trouble with. They cannot get past Him. They cannot go around Him. He is an "offence" to them. And, since He is described as "a stone" and "a rock," this means that we are not going to change Him, especially since it is God Who has ordained that He would be like this to them.

We who are believers do not find Him that way at all. We love Him. We would not change Him if we could. He is just like we want Him to be, more wonderful than we could ever have imagined.

But we have to say this also: We would not feel about Him as we do if it were not for the grace of God in opening our eyes to the unspeakable loveliness of Christ. You see, we would look upon the Lord Jesus the same way if it were not for the goodness of God in changing us. The fault is not in Christ; the fault is in the hearts of men. And it is man, not Christ, who needs the changing. Thank God, Jesus Christ cannot be changed, but man can.

Never do we see how offensive Christ is to man than we do in the preaching of the Gospel. And what I want to do tonight is to suggest some of the things about Christ that are offensive to the human heart. God obviously has not ordered the Gospel so that it, in and of itself, would attract people to God. And these offences that have to do with Christ, we cannot change. Remember the words "stone" and "rock."

How did Christ offend men? Let us note some of the ways.

I. BY HIS CLAIM TO BE THE SON OF GOD.

Turn to John 5:17-18. And then see John 10:30-39.

They were offended by the truth of the incarnation. They did not want to believe that Jesus, a man, could also be the Son of God, God manifested in the flesh.

The chief purpose of our Lord's earthly ministry, the purpose of His miracles and His teaching, was to show that our Lord was more than a mere man. Cf. John 20:30, 31.

And because men stumble at this, even though they claim to be theologians, they are thrown into a very contradictory position. They deny that Jesus is the Christ, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, and yet they recommend Him as possibly the greatest of all teachers. Could He be both? If He were not God, how could we acclaim Him as a great teacher when His basic claim would have been a farce. If

He were not the Son of God, we should pay no attention to anything that he had to say. He would be the greatest of impostors.

But think also of what this would do to the truth of salvation which is clearly the chief doctrine of Scripture. It would make Jesus Christ an ordinary man, one who himself needed a saviour--and thus we would have no salvation at all. The incarnation of Christ is absolutely essential if we are to believe the words, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

There is a second, unchangeable fact that was, and still is, a stumblingblock that keeps people from Christ.

II. BY HIS CLAIM THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO DIE ON THE CROSS.

The disciples were able to get past the first, but only by God's grace. But they had real difficulty here.

Cf. Matt. 16:21-23.

Peter understood this very well. Remember also the Lord's words to the disciples as they went out to the mount of Olives. Cf. Matt. 26:31-35.

The Cross is definitely a stumblingblock.

Paul told the Corinthians, "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:23). And he wrote to the Galatians about "the offence of the cross" (Gal. 5:11).

And the Jews and the Gentiles have done everything possible to get around "the offence of the Cross." Man is so blinded to his real need that he does not want to admit that such suffering was necessary to provide salvation for them.

Now let me add to that another offence that is closely related to the Cross.

III. CHRIST OFFENDED PEOPLE, AND THEY ARE STILL OFFENDED, BY BEING TOLD THAT HE IS THE ONLY WAY OF SALVATION.

We have such verses which I have quoted many times, and will continue to quote as long as the Lord gives me breath--verses like John 14:6 and Acts 4:12.

But along this like notice the Lord's words in John 6:51-65.

Not only had the Lord taught that He was the only way of salvation, but He taught that they would not come to Him unless the Father drew them. Cf. John 6:44.

Note the result that this teaching had: cf. John 6:66. But notice also the response of the twelve in vv. 67-69.

A fourth offence:

IV. THE TEACHING OF ELECTION.

Oh, how people bristle at this truth! It is an offence to many who claim to be Christians--and undoubtedly many of them are.

But there is no question but that it is taught in the Word. Look at Paul's comments in Rom. 9. People were ready to say that God was not righteous if this were the way it is. They found fault with God. But notice Paul's questions in Rom. 9:20-24.

One other thing, although there are many other ways in which the Lord is "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence."

V. THE TEACHING THAT SALVATION IS BY FAITH ALONE.

Cf. Rom. 9:30-33.

The Jews wanted to add circumcision, and other good works. The Gentiles are just as bad, insisting on baptism, or on church membership, or good works.

But it is offensive to people to be told that salvation is by faith alone, without works. And it is an added offence when you tell some people that even their faith comes from God, and from Christ, and from the Word of God. Cf. Rom. 10:17; Eph. 2:8, 9; Heb. 12:2.

Concl: Why has God made our Lord Jesus Christ, the dearest One you and I have ever known, an offence to men?

There are two main answers:

- 1) It could not help but be that way because of the heart of man. Remember that God has sent His Son as He is; it is man who is offended at Christ because man is a sinner. And so it is not surprising that men are offended with Christ.
- 2) God has ordained all things for His own glory. And this includes salvation. Therefore, it is all to His glory if sinful men and women and children find the Lord Jesus unspeakably precious. Such a thing could only be the result of the sovereign grace of God.

One final comment: Let us quit trying to make the Gospel more attractive to sinners. The Gospel message is intended to convict and humble sinners, not make them feel good about themselves. And so let us in gracious and loving ways give the true Gospel of the grace of God, even though it makes them mad, and makes some turn permanently away from us. Christ is not the One they want, but He is the One they need. And if the Lord sees fit to open their eyes, as only He can do, then they will find that the despised Jesus was the One whom they needed, and the One they will love more than life itself.

(Conclude by reading 1 Pet. 2:1-10.)