

One Strange Stone

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon 'One Strange Stone' explores the paradox of Jesus as both the cornerstone of faith and a stumbling block for those who reject Him.

Duration: 54:15

Scripture: Isaiah 8:14, Isaiah 28:16, Romans 9:30

Topics: "Stumbling Stone"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept that some good things can have a negative impact on people. He gives examples of how ambulances, which save lives, can also bring death, and how water, essential for life, can also be deadly. The preacher then addresses the idea that some people believe they can live a good life without the need for a miraculous conversion or being born again. He emphasizes the importance of trusting in Jesus, who is referred to as the stone that causes men to stumble but also offers salvation to those who trust in him. The sermon concludes with the message that Jesus is a strange stone, both causing stumbling and offering eternal security.

Transcript

Turn in your Bibles with me to the book of Romans. Romans 9, let's turn to one of the most difficult chapters in the whole of Scripture. Any preacher, any commentator, expositor will tell you Romans 9, some deep waters.

But all Scripture is given, inspired by God for our edification and learning. So we're gonna learn from Romans, the 9th chapter. We're gonna read at the very end of it.

Romans 9, verse 30, okay? And I'll bring you up to speed on where Paul got, how Paul got to where he is. But let's start reading in verse 30, okay? What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it. A righteousness that is by what? Faith.

But Israel, Jewish people, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Look up at me for a second. Now, let's read that one again.

What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, anyone who's not a Jew, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it. A righteousness that is by faith. But Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.

Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith, but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written. And then he quotes from two places, merges two passages together from Isaiah.

I'll tell you about that later. 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, who's Him, the stone, will never be put to shame.

Let's read that passage again there. See, I, who's I? God, lay in Zion. What's Zion? The very place where God's people are.

A stone that causes men to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall. That's odd. And, or but, the one who trusts in Him, which identifies the rock, Jesus.

The stone is Jesus, will never be put to shame. Now, the name of this message you can get in a tape form at the end is called, One Strange Stone. And I want to talk about the fact that some good things, excellent things, have a double-edged sword to them, and can end up hurting people.

This is commonplace in life. For example, yesterday, like every other day in the city, I am sure, although I don't know this for a fact, but it's just a matter of course in our city. Many, many people were rushed by ambulances to hospitals across our land, and in the city, to get there just in time.

Mothers were helped giving birth. People got surgery just in time. People stabbed or shot in some violent activity got help, maybe just in the nick of time.

Bleeding was stopped just in the nick of time. And if you just go back to the pioneer days when our country was being settled, sometimes the nearest doctor was 150, 200 miles away. And there were no automobiles.

An ambulance is an automobile, and it can get you there faster than walking or running can. Now, unfortunately, as great as the automobile is, yesterday, at a terrible corner in Richmond Hill, in Queens, near 103rd Avenue, two cars hit. There was an accident.

Nobody was arrested, but an accident occurred, and a car jumped up onto a curb from the collision, where a mother was waiting with her two children to cross, and a four-year-old boy died. As of the news last night, the mother was alive, and the six-month-old child was in stable condition. But the same car, in the form of an ambulance that helped so many people, the same car brought death to a boy.

Yesterday, while the city is undergoing still an alert for don't waste water, because our reservoirs are low, we want rain, we want storms. There was some rain this week, which everybody was happy about, the city officials. But yesterday, in Appalachia, southern West Virginia, into Virginia, flash floods occurred by some very strong storms, and seven people died from too much water.

Here, we're asking for water. Here, they got so much, seven people died from water. You can't live without water, but water can also kill you, if it comes too much at the wrong time.

And that's what Paul is talking about here, when he talks about one strange stone. Now, in the ninth chapter of Romans, he begins to tell about how he has a burden for his Jewish heritage, his Jewish people. And from there, he talks about the fact that God's promises have not failed, even though the Jews rejected the Messiah, because the true Jew, he says, is not one biologically, but it's the one who has the

faith of Father Abraham.

From there, he goes into a passage about the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church. Even though Jesus was Jewish, the twelve apostles were Jewish, and Paul was Jewish, he's now writing to the church in Rome, which was made up of Jews and Gentiles. So he's saying, God's plan for the church, which is different than Israel, God's plan for the church has both Jew and Gentile in it.

And he said, those who believe and who have become children of Abraham are not just Jews who believe, but Gentiles who believe. This gospel has reached to you. And from there, he goes into the strange paradox that just at once, you were disobedient Gentiles to God, but now you've received mercy, and now they have been disobedient for you to be included, and God is working with both people.

Then he goes to a still stranger paradox about this stone. Listen to it again, look at my face. Behold, I, God, lay in Zion.

Now, let's stop there. Zion was a hill in Jerusalem that was across from Mount Moriah, where the temple was. And Zion, Mount Zion, or Zion the hill, on Zion's hill, that was the site of David's palace, not the temple.

That was built on Mount Moriah, but the site of David's palace and where the court leaders of Israel met. Now, the spiritual meaning of Zion is, in the Old Testament, it's where God's people are. Zion stood for Jerusalem, the heart of God's people.

In the New Testament, it's used of the church. It's used of the work of the gospel, where God is moving and building his church. That's Zion.

We make up Zion today. So, this is strange, brothers and sisters. I, God, lay in Zion, not among the Muslims or the Buddhists or the Hindus.

I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and a rock of offense. But whosoever believes in him, the rock, we know the rock is a person, Jesus, will not be put to shame. That means, literally, when it's quoted from the Old Testament, it means won't make haste or get agitated by fear.

So, let me get this. God says, but why would he do that? I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and a rock of offense that people, here's a speaker down here, you can't see it, it's a monitor, that people will be walking and go, oops, and trip and fall. Who put that there? God says, I did, in Zion.

But then he turns and then he says there's another side to that, but the stone is a person and whoever puts their trust in him, that person, will never be ashamed, will never make haste, will never get agitated. If you could just hold the children, please, as quiet as possible. Wow, that's a loud one.

So, now let's... Why would God do that? Who wants to put a stumbling stone? I thought God is constructive. I thought God helps people to walk. I thought God is for enabling people.

Well, let's look for a second, just look at me. I'll give you the references. If you like, write them down or get the tape and they'll have them on there.

But listen, here are the verses that he quotes from, both from Isaiah. The first verse that he refers to is Isaiah 28, 16. Now, look at my face and listen to this.

This is what the sovereign Lord says. See, I lay a stone in Zion. But listen how different it is here in this first passage.

A tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation, the one who trusts will never be dismayed. Now, that sounds more like it. Now, that is... that's off the hook.

Listen, this is what the sovereign Lord says. See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation. You know, you can't build on sand, you got to build on a stone, a rock.

The one who trusts will never be dismayed. But, how come it's different in Romans? Well, he merges it together with Isaiah 8, 14 and 15. Now, listen to this.

And he will be a sanctuary, speaking of the Messiah, for both houses of Israel. He will be a stone. Here we go, here we go, now we're cooking.

He will be a stone that causes men to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem, the city of God, he will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will stumble, they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured.

You know what? I can't understand this. The Bible is schizophrenic. I don't get it.

God says, I lay a stone in Zion, a sure stone, a foundation stone, a precious stone, a tested stone. The stone is a person, and everyone who trusts in him will never be discouraged or dismayed. I got that.

But Paul says, no, but the other side is true. God says, that same stone is a stone of stumbling. It's a rock of offense where people will get offended and say, no, no, I'm not going.

Not if you say that, I'm not going. That stone will become a trap and a snare. And many will fall.

And many will be trapped. What is God doing? Is he into saving? Or is he into trapping? Is he into laying a foundation for me? Or is he into tripping me up? And the stone, in all these cases, is a person. The trap is a person.

The snare is a person. And that person is Jesus Christ. Well, how could that be, Pastor Cimbala? I thought Jesus came as the Savior of the world.

Didn't say, you know, until you did this day, a trap is born. A stumbling stone is born. No, that's not what the angel said.

So what's Paul saying here? Well, Paul says, it's a tested, precious cornerstone for a sure foundation. Anyone who trusts in him will never be ashamed. Yet, also, a stumbling stone, a rock of offense, a trap, a snare.

Many will stumble. They will fall and be broken. They will be snared and captured.

All of it, all in one stone. And that stone is Jesus. So, as they say, south of the border.

Que pasa? What's happening here? Now, here's another one. Listen to this. Psalm 118 verse 22 says this.

The stone the builders rejected. Here we go with that stone again. The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone or the headstone of the corner.

You know when you see an old building? They still do it now. But when you see a real old building. I was in an old church in Chicago that Pastor Toledo and Chrissy moved into.

It's an older building. And right on the corner, there's a capstone, a cornerstone that gives you the date it was built. You ever seen that? So, now, Psalm 118 verse 22 says.

The stone, not the enemies rejected. The stone the builders rejected. In other words, some builders are building a building and somebody brings a stone to them, Pastor Bogstad.

And the builders, the ones in charge. In this case, the religious establishment says. We're not using that stone.

No, no, no. You know what? We're not building with that stone. That stone does not fit into the building that we want to build.

And God says, No, you don't fit into the building I'm building. That stone is the cornerstone. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

The thing that made the builders stumble and reject. God says, You might reject it. I'm building on it.

Ah, listen. More light is coming. Listen now.

Listen. Don't praise the Lord so much you interrupt me, okay? Now, Matthew 21, 42. Listen to what Jesus says.

Jesus says, He said to them, Have you never read in Scriptures the stone the builders rejected? He's quoting now. From Psalm 118. Has become the capstone.

The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes. In other words, they were sizing up Jesus. And they were looking for a Messiah.

But when they looked at Jesus, Were you from Nazareth? You were a carpenter? You're eating with sinners? You're hanging around Mary Magdalene? Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? No way. And the people began to follow Him, but the religious establishment said, No way. And Jesus said, You're fulfilling it.

It's written. The stone the builders rejected. You're the builders.

You're the religious leaders. The stone that you reject. God is making the cornerstone.

Oh God, this is marvelous in our eyes. The religious experts didn't know the cornerstone when it was standing right in front of them. What an awesome warning to all of us.

Now, the plot thickens. Peter goes on to say this in 1 Peter 2, 7 and 8. Now to you who believe. Here we go.

Now we got something concrete. Now to you who believe, Christians, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.

A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. So Peter says, The church has been built on the rock Christ Jesus. And to you that believe, you know how precious and sure it is.

What a wonderful stone. But the very stone that you rejoice in, the builders have rejected. Not only rejected, they trip over it.

They stumble and they fall. It becomes a trap and a snare to them. So, what is this two-edged sword, this double stone, this strange stone? It's the only foundation, but it's the stumbling block.

That's who Jesus is. Jesus to everybody in this auditorium is either the precious cornerstone or in the end he will be a snare and a trap to you. He's God's capstone or he's rejected by the builders themselves.

Remember what Paul said in 2 Corinthians about his ministry of preaching the gospel. He says, As we preach the gospel, we're the odor, we're the smell of life to some and what are we the smell of to others? Death. What, do you have two different sermons? No, listen.

Same sermon about Jesus. Some smelt it and went, Oh, salvation, thank you. Others, I rejected.

And in doing it, they got damned. Life, death. Same message, same stone.

Remember when Jesus was brought at 8 days old into the temple to be circumcised and Mary and Joseph brought him in and who was the name of that? Anyone know the name of that older man who was moved by the Holy Spirit? Simeon came and he took the child and as he was prophesying over the baby, he said to the mother, You see this child? He is for the rising and the falling of many in Israel. Through him, so many are going to be raised up and gain salvation and enter the kingdom of heaven. But also through him, oh, so many will doom themselves.

Because the rock, which is the foundation and the capstone is also the stumbling stone. So now let's close today by applying this. I've given you wonderful verses from the word of God, but let's apply this.

Let's start in the primary sense. That's the best way. Scripture interprets Scripture.

So let's just look at the application here. Paul says, to lead up to this, he said, Isn't this something? Isn't this strange? The Jew, the Gentiles were not looking for righteousness. They were just, had multiple gods sleeping around just living terrible lives.

They were not even looking for any, they didn't have the law, they weren't trying to live a godly life. And he says, They found a righteousness that comes from God, which is by faith. They weren't even looking for it.

And it came. And like little children, they said, What? He died for us? We violated his word? We're sinners? Yeah, we are. We're that hopeless? We're just depraved? And our righteousness is like filthy rags to be more literal, excuse me, the menstrual rags of a woman at that time of the month.

That's what the literal Greek means. And the Gentiles said, Yeah, that's right. We are a mess.

And he died for us? It means someone had to die? That's how lost we are? Yeah, I received that. I received the gift of that salvation. They weren't even looking for it.

So Paul says, Isn't that something? He said, The Gentiles, who weren't looking for righteousness, found righteousness by faith. And the Jews, who had the law and had the Bible, and were saying, Yes, this is

what God said. I got to try to do this.

I got to do this better tomorrow. And you know what? I'm better than those people because they don't even have the law, those low lives over there. But I got to get more.

And he said, They never found the righteousness. They never found it. They were doomed.

Because they tried to find it by works. They tried to earn something from God. So the message of the gospel, which was, Believe and you shall be saved.

Just come the way you are. God will change you. Just believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

He died on the cross. He was ripped apart for you. And by His stripes you're healed.

He was wounded for your transgression. That message was a message of hope. And the church was built on it.

But to those who wanted to earn their salvation and who were self-righteous, it was a stump, stumbled. They said, Wait a minute. Who do you think you're talking to? You think we're some kind of animals? What is this stuff? All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

I'm not a sinner. That whore is a sinner. That crack addict is a sinner.

Hey, you know how I grew up? You know how my parents raised me? I'm a good person. Listen, I heard that on Oprah Winfrey. If you just live a good life, God takes care of everybody.

And I live a good life. Come on. How many have ever heard that? What's this? Jesus died.

His blood. Why do you have to talk blood? What's blood? What are you bringing in nasty things? His blood. He had to die for me.

I'm that lost. Yeah, sure. No, listen.

I'm living a good life. And I'm gonna study more and live a better life tomorrow. But I'm gonna pick myself up by my own foot straps.

I don't need this miraculous conversion stuff. You must be born again stuff. You just do the best you can.

Am I right? Look, everybody do your best you can. You know, Pastor Cymbal, you really insult me. Because you're talking to me like I'm some vagrant.

I, look. I work. I pay my taxes.

I'm raising my children. I'm working overtime so they can go to private school. Who do you think you're talking to? Many think you're talking to like some sinner.

Still in the stumbling. They're trapped. Snared.

The same message that brought life and salvation, that same message, they're trapped. They're trapped by it. The Jews would not receive it.

Am I right, Pastor Buckstaff? They would not receive it. What do you mean? What are you talking about? My righteousness is like the menstrual rags of a woman. You know what? That's very insulting.

It's like the time here about 15 years ago in this building, they brought a guy forward who had been drinking. He'd been drinking a lot. But they brought him forward.

They said, he won't leave until you pray for him. So I was very, very tired. And it was late at night.

And I said, what's your name? And he said, Archie or something. I said, all right, Archie. I want to talk to you about your life.

And he's just like this. Just, you know, his glazed eyes and his breath reeked of alcohol. And he's like this.

And he's just filthy dressed down the street. I said, look. And I would quote him from the King James, which I stopped doing from that moment on.

I said, Jesus loves you. Jesus wants to help you. He can change your life.

Because the Bible says, if any man be in Christ Jesus, he's a new creature. And he went, wait a minute. Did you just call me a creature? I said, no.

He said, no, you did. What do you think? I'm a creature? Why? Because I'm a little down on myself right now? What am I, a creature like Dracula, Frankenstein? I'm a creature? I said, no, that's a verse. Creature means like creation.

He said, no, you call me a creature. Why? You got your fancy suit on. You're not a creature, but I'm a creature? Well, he misunderstood the meaning of a word, but this stone of stumbling.

Do you all get what I'm talking about? The gospel Jesus, to one, is the foundation of a new life. Hallelujah. But to another person, it's the thing they stumble over.

It's happened in this building all the time. I spoke to a congressman from the United States Congress about 15, 18 years ago, and as I was sharing the gospel with him, he turned to me and said, I've heard that before. He said, look, I'm a lawyer.

I can't accept what you say. You mean just believe, and you're saved. You don't have to try anything, or change, or do away with things.

You just come the way you are and believe. I said, that's exactly it. You confess your sins, and you believe God does the changing.

But you're saved the minute you put your faith. And he said, no. No, no, no.

He said, look, you're naive, or you're a religious fanatic. I know how life works. You do good, you get paid.

You don't do good, you go to hell. Makes sense, doesn't it? Does that make sense? That's not true. Because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

How many are happy that even though you haven't done good, you're saved by the grace of Jesus Christ today? Let's put our hands together and thank the Lord. So, listen. The foundation stone is the stumbling stone.

But let's go further with this. Because even when you become a Christian, there are basic truths that cut both ways. Not just justification by grace through faith.

Jesus said, if any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Now, to the person who understands that, you realize, my life belongs to Jesus. And I have no plans but to do His will.

Even as it's written about Jesus, hold the children, please. Even as it's written about Jesus, I came to do Your will, O Father. In other words, for the very foundation of being a Christian is to follow Jesus and take up your cross and follow Him.

And the cross is something that you deny yourself on. Jesus didn't enjoy going to Calvary. It wasn't physically nice.

But as part of God's plan for His life, He accepted the cross and by doing that, He brought salvation to you and I. He fulfilled God's mission for Him. And Jesus said to all of us here, do you want to follow Me? Then take up your cross and die to what you like and follow Me. Because whoever loses his life will find it and gain it.

And whoever holds on to his life and finds it will... Now, to some people who have made great sacrifices for God and learned that there's a joy unspeakable and full of glory when you do that, they have used that as a foundation stone. That is a stone of rejoicing to them. They can tell you, people in our own church, Pastor Simba, I used to want to have my way and then I realized that what Jesus was calling me to was the right way.

But that same stone of foundation, that same capstone to another person who might be sitting here today is, hey Pastor Simba, please, get a grip on yourself. I don't mind a little talk about God, but taking up some cross, denying myself, that's the way you believe. No, I don't believe that.

It's in the Bible. No, that's your interpretation. It must mean something else.

Because anything I don't agree with means something else. That's how a lot of people read the Bible. Anything that doesn't hit me right, it must mean something else.

So they stumble over it and they say, no, no, no, no, no. Listen, I got my plans. I went to college.

I got my plans, my will. This is what I like to do. This is what I want for my family.

Ah, but to be a true follower of Jesus, He said, if anybody comes after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me and you'll have a peace that passes all understanding. And you'll have a rest because you'll know this is not my thing I'm doing. This is your thing, Jesus.

And if I'm doing your thing, you've got to take care of me. How many say amen? But if I'm doing my thing, I've got to take care of myself, so I'd rather have you take care of me, so I'll do your thing. Ah, but to another person, it's please, please.

Let's go further. Jesus said you must be born again. Doesn't matter what your background is.

Doesn't matter if you're a Baptist, Anglican, Pentecostal. You know what that means? Zip. Oh no, but my family grew up and I got sprinkles as an infant.

Zero. Zero. Only thing that water did was get you wet.

Jesus said you must be born again. You have to have an inner transformation. Look at me everyone.

You've got to have an inner transformation of your life. You've got to have a personal experience with Jesus Christ. Forget the Baptist thing or the Pentecostal thing or the Brooklyn Tabernacle thing.

The question is have you been born again? Do you know what it is? To have your life changed. Have you become a new creation? That's what Jesus said. Now to some, that is the most wonderful capstone, foundation stone.

Yes, Jesus can change my life. He can absolutely transform me and make me into what He wants me to be. There's supernatural power in the gospel.

Oh, thank you Jesus. But to another person, it's hey look, you know my wife gets carried away with this stuff or my husband or whoever. But you know, look, I didn't grow up that way.

Yeah, but I don't care how you grew up and I don't care how I grew up. Jesus said, you must be born again. To one person, it's a foundation stone.

To another person, it's a stone of stumbling. Let me give you one last one that hits a little closer to home which I'm very concerned about as we move on here with the Lord into new facilities and yet more people coming. Very hard to keep track of people when you're a pastor.

But that's what shepherds are supposed to do as musicians come. Did you know that Jesus will never make a treaty or an alliance with any sin in your life? Did you know that the minute you have something secret and hidden, Jesus starts to work on you? Now, that's because it's like a cancer and what good doctor would say, oh, there's a cancer growing but because nobody can see it, I'll just leave it alone. I don't want to bother you.

I want to do surgery and like cut you open and take out those cancerous cells. That would be nasty. No, a good doctor says, that thing could kill you.

It's coming out. And that's the way Jesus is. If you have a secret life, if you have a secret anything, secret attitude, resentment, if you have a secret practice, if you have anything, the very thing that makes people who really love the Lord rejoice, oh, Pastor Cymbala, you know how much he loves me, whom the Lord loves? He also, he even corrects me.

By the way, how many of you here since you've been a Christian, you've drifted and you've done things that are not right and the Lord got after your case real quick? Come on, wave your hand at me. The Lord ever got on your case? Yeah. Okay.

So, but did you know to another person? Listen, Pastor Cymbala, who do you think you're talking to? Nobody's perfect. You know, we had this tragic case involving Pastor Bogstaff just a few weeks ago. One of our pastors was interviewing a couple to get married and this couple went through, I guess, the appropriate interviews.

But the thing got handed over to Pastor Bogstaff for some reason right close to the wedding just a couple weeks ago, a weeks away. So Pastor Bogstaff met with the couple because he was going to do the wedding and something troubled Pastor Bogstaff. That's this man right here for those of you that are

visiting.

So something, something bothered my friend and he began to pray something's wrong. So he said to the couple, Are you two living together? You have separate addresses. You're not living together.

No, we're not living together. So then he couldn't get any peace. Am I right? So he began to pray and the Lord began to trouble him.

So he called them in again. Are you two living together? There's something, I'm very troubled. Is everything right? Because if we're going to get married, we got to do this right before the Lord.

No. Yeah, everything's right. And we're going to have nice flowers in the wedding and, you know, boutonnieres.

This is what people think about when they get married. It's so ridiculous. They're worried about the little presents that everyone's going to get at their plate.

Strain at a gnat and they swallow camel. So my friend is really troubled. So he goes to pray.

I pray, Pastor Bogstaff, and God, you know, is just really bothering him. Suddenly a call comes in from a relative from another state of one of the parties. I think the man.

And says, You know what? Not for nothing, I'm not a Christian, but you ought to know this. They're both living together. And it's really a shame to us.

So Pastor Bogstaff calls me. It's Wednesday. The wedding is scheduled for Saturday.

Invitations, church, Pastor Bogstaff officiating. Pastor Bogstaff said, Pastor Semble, what do we do? I said, Well, you're not doing the wedding, and I'm not doing the wedding. We'll have nothing to do with this wedding.

Do you have this guy's cell phone number? Yeah, I have it. So I said, Stay on one line. Remember Pastor Bogstaff? I had Pastor Bogstaff on one line.

I have two phones at home. Two lines. The other one I had.

And I had got the cell phone. So Pastor Bogstaff could only hear what I was saying. He couldn't hear the other person.

Hello, is this so-and-so? Yeah. Who's this? On my cell phone. This is Pastor Semble.

You remember me, your friendly little preacher. Oh, hi, Pastor Semble. Praise God.

How are you? Hey, I want to ask you something. Didn't Pastor Bogstaff ask you twice? Haven't we been going through a procedure? You living together? Because we just got a call from your sister, whoever. You're living together.

You're living together, right? You lied to my friend, didn't you? You lied to us. We're trying to do right before God and you lie like a rug. No, no, Pastor Semble, you don't understand.

No, I understand very well. Is your sister lying to us? No, yes, it is true. I said, you know what? You're a very crooked person.

You're a crook. I wouldn't marry you if I had... for a million dollars. And he's not going to marry you.

No, no, no, you don't understand. I said, no, I understand exactly. You're crooked.

You're a liar. What do you think? We're going to lay our hands on you and God's going to do some magic while you're lying and sleeping and fornicating with this woman? And what kind of pastor am I? Pastor Bogstaff will tell you I said it. What kind of preacher am I? What kind of poor excuse of a minister am I? How many months have you been visiting our church and you didn't get that through your head? Well, I just got a letter from them.

I told him last week. And this man is very upset with me because they went ahead and got married, right? He's very upset with me. I am very disappointed by you, me and my wife, that you lifted your voice to me.

Now, I didn't call him a snake like Jesus called people. I didn't call him a brood of vipers, did I? I didn't call him a whited sepulcher who has nothing but dead men's bones inside of him. I didn't call him a hypocrite.

All of those things Jesus called people. I didn't use any of that. I just said you're a crook.

He said in the letter, and you know what? You lifted your voice at me. I thought you were a man of God. Man of God.

I wish I could have climbed through that phone, man of God. So listen. Did you know what? Jesus is not making a treaty.

And if we're going to be honest, we'll never make a treaty. I don't love... I love all of you as God is my witness. Pastors, do I love them? Pastor Byrd, do I love the people? I don't love any... None of you I don't love more than Jesus.

And it becomes between you pleasing you and pleasing Jesus. You will lose every time. And you know what? Pastor Bogstaff, listen.

Pastor Bogstaff feels the same way. But you know what? This is a stone of stumbling. What do people have in their mind that church is about? Getting married.

What kind of play thing? What kind of play acting is that? To have a minister marry you. What would Pastor Bogstaff be able to do with something that God says he's going to curse? What? Are you going to undo the curse during the ceremony? The very strange things are going on. I just got a letter before I walked out here at 9 o'clock this morning.

I opened it right before I prayed with the prayer band from a lady in Ohio who goes to a church. Her husband plays in the church orchestra and she was saying our choir is doing your wife's new album at some music conference and we're so excited and I've read your books and your wife's book and they've been such a blessing and I want to tell you now the prayer band and your Tuesday night prayer meetings I want to give you three praise reports. Number one, our 19 year old daughter who had left home and went into a lesbian relationship with another woman God has brought her back home and she's turned around and she wants to follow the Lord now.

And I want to give you another praise report and she went on and on. And she said, but you know what? Pray for us because you know in my church I really don't understand. She said, my husband plays in the orchestra.

Plays the bass something. Bass trombone. And she said, there's a big disruption.

If I didn't read this today. She said, one of the French horn players is a young girl that's 20 years old. And the head of the orchestra who works for the pastor, he just discovered that she had moved in and was living with her unsaved boyfriend.

So he confronted her and said, you can't play in the orchestra anymore if you're going to do such an ungodly thing. And there's a real battle going on in the church over this Pastor Cymbala because her whole family left. They got so insulted that somebody would say, you can't play that French horn anymore because you're shacking up with someone who's not your husband.

Who are you to say that? Don't you know God is love? That's the way you see those verses. You know there's some very strange things going on around. But I want you to know Jesus is the sure foundation and He will never make treaty with sin in your life.

He will take away your peace. He will take away your joy. If you're a Christian today and you're not enjoying the peace and the joy of the Lord, the first thing you look at is sin.

First thing you look for is sin. Don't look for demons. Look for sin.

Demons can't take your joy. And you don't repent of demons. You repent of sin.

Sin is what will take you. Sin opens up the way for demons to get in. But sin, Jim's symbol is sin.

My sin. I gotta make that a foundation stone, not a stumbling stone. I can't make excuses for that.

I can't justify that. Let me give you one last one because the foundation stone is the stumbling stone. I'm giving you here the foundation stones.

Did you ever notice this about Jesus? That He's no respecter of persons and He's totally colorblind and He doesn't know any nationalities and His church is made up of poor people and all kinds of some wealthy people but very few wealthy, rich people believe, the Bible says. How many rich are among you? Very few. Did you know that Jesus is the friend of common people? Did you know that Jesus doesn't favor any country? Did you know that Jesus isn't white and Jesus isn't black? Did you know that the glory of the church is that from every nation and tribe and tongue in heaven, they're all dressed in white and they're singing praises to the Lamb that sits on the throne.

Think of that foundation stone which is a stumbling stone to so many people that holds them back from really serving Jesus. Think in the days of the Bible when the Gentiles heard that Jesus was Jewish and the Savior that they would have to worship is Jewish. You know how old anti-Semitism is? The Apostle Paul would preach, yes, this Jew, Jesus, died for you.

He came through the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the first 12 apostles were Jewish and now you, you Italian or you Greek, come and join the... You know how many people didn't follow because they said, we're going to hang around with Jews? Come on. Come on. And how many Jews? Am I right, pastors? How much persecution did Paul face? Because he said, and the church isn't just for Jewish

people, it's for Gentiles and the Jewish people used to call Gentiles dogs, Gentile dogs.

Wait a minute, we're the children of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and we're going to be with these heathen in the same church? We have to get saved the same way they do? Come, get a life. We're not being with them. Think over the centuries how many white people have lost out with God because they won't be with people who are different or Europeans who won't be with Americans.

Think about that. I was not even in the ministry a year and my wife and I were visiting St. Louis in this literally white church, white as rice church and the minister said, not knowing it was a sword through my soul, not knowing anything about me. I knew more about God in the basketball court than he knew.

He said, yes, you know, and a black family visited the other day. I said, they must have only visited because they sure ain't around now. He said, and did you know what? They didn't even know better.

They put their little child in the nursery with our children. Can you believe that? Just, just, why don't you just stab me? Think about all the black people who have it in for white people. The foundation stone is a stumbling stone.

They're into their blackness and they don't know that blackness is nothing. Your blackness is zero and your whiteness is zero and your Latino-ness is zero and your zero is zero because the only one that matters is Jesus. Oh, hallelujah.

Let's praise him together. Let's praise him together. We worship you, Lord.

Come on, everyone. Let's praise him. Jesus, we thank you.

You're no respecter of persons. So, so, there are black pastors now who won't return my phone calls in the city because I'm the man. I didn't even know I was the man.

And we have some of their staff and their members in their church who have actually said to our members, imagine, members of my church have said to them, what's wrong with you? How could you be such a disgrace to your race and go to a church with a white past? You know what those people need? They need to get saved. They need to get saved. I don't care if they prophesize, speak in tongues, wear high collars and bishop's robes and all the rest of that stuff.

That's not Jesus. The capstone has become the stumbling stone and it's more than that. I hear West Indian black people say nasty things about American black people.

Better not say that in my presence or I'll rebuke you where you're standing. And I hear American black people speak about evil things about West Indian black people. The capstone has become a trap to you.

It's a snare. You'll be broken. You won't break the stone.

You'll break yourself because to Jesus, everybody's the same and I'm so happy. How many are happy? Wave your hand at me. To Jesus, we're all the same.

Absolutely the same. So, listen. Jesus and these truths I gave you, you will either build on them or you will stumble on them.

Let's pray. Everybody, heads bowed. No one moving.

Father God, we humble ourselves before you and I'm concerned, Lord, that as more people come to the church and the crowds get yet larger with this new facility, that we develop into something that's not a Christian church but it's just a happening. Just crowds of people but the foundation stone has become a stumbling stone. They're just there for the excitement or the music or to look good.

But then I end up pastoring something that is a stench in your nostrils. So, Lord, we don't care if the choir goes down to five people. We don't care if there's one musician.

We pastors don't care if we lose half our membership, Lord. We are going to build on Jesus and his word by your grace. For those that it's a stumbling stone, either help them or get them out.

But don't let them contaminate the body of Christ. We love them and you love them. But, Lord, you talked about that a little leaven leavens the whole loaf.

Help us never to compromise for money no matter what someone offers to pay us. Help us never to compromise to keep somebody in the church with their tithes or to marry them because they've made this big plan and they're about to pay the church money to use the building. Help us to be yelled at.

Give us grace to be hated even, to be disrespected. But keep us true, Jesus, to the cornerstone. You said in your word in the last days perilous times will come.

They will have a form of godliness but they will deny the power thereof. They'll have some tradition but they won't really know you in power in their lives. So as the pastor of this church, come on, Pastor Bogstaff, Pastor Bird, Pastor Ware, Pastor Hammond, any of the other pastors that are here, let's kneel right here in front of the church.

You're not going to be a stumbling stone, Lord. You're going to be a capstone, a precious stone tried. Help us to have the courage to be misunderstood, to have people walk out while we're preaching.

Help us to speak the truth in love with compassion but it's the truth. And you said that beware when all men speak well of you. We don't want a big crowd.

We want Christians. We don't want a big church. We want a godly church.

I don't want to be famous, Lord. I want to be true to you. Save us from this cloud of darkness that's enveloping not just our country but it's enveloping the church.

These techniques and these philosophies and these methodologies that are not of the Bible, not of you, Lord. Help our people to live godly lives. If you're here today and you're going through any kind of battle in your life and you got touched by the Holy Spirit while I was speaking God's Word and you would like us to pray for you, just stand where you are.

Pastor Symbol, that message was for me in a way that you don't know but I'm standing for prayer. I humble myself. I want to be all out for Jesus.

I want to live holy like Jesus. I want to trust only in Jesus. Just stand wherever you are.

If somebody is standing near you, would you just stand next to them and put your hand on their arm or on their shoulder and would you begin to pray for them right now if somebody's standing near you?

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