

STONY GROUND

Peter Hay, prepared for word ministry, 18 July 2020
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Introduction

Today I will continue our study of the parable of the sower and the seed. Last session we considered wayside ground, and today we will examine stony ground. We will begin by reading what Jesus said when He explained stony ground.

Stony ground – germination; something new

‘But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.’ Mat 13:20-21.

On this topic, the Gospel of Mark is similar to the Gospel of Matthew.

In Luke’s Gospel, we read, ‘But the ones on the rock *are those* who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.’ Luk 8:13.

A person who hears the word and receives it with joy has been *born again as a son of God*.

The seed has fallen in the heart of this person. The seed has been *received* into the heart, but contrasts with wayside ground, where the seed was also received into the heart but did not *germinate*.

In the ‘stony-ground’ heart, the seed has fallen into the ground of the heart and has germinated.

In this person, it is evident that *joy* relates to *germination* because there is a shoot that comes up, something *new* has been brought forth.

The four ‘grounds’ are within each person

Before talking more about that, I want to make the point that it is not that there are some people whose heart is wayside ground, some who are stony ground, some who are thorny ground, and some who are good ground.

The issue of the grounds is applicable to *everyone*.

It is to do with *how we respond to the word when it is received into our heart*.

As we learnt last week, we *all* must break up the ‘fallow’ ground and seek the Lord.

In relation to stony ground, we must understand what it means to *recover from stumbling*.

Regarding thorny ground, we need to understand what it means to *choose the reproaches of Christ* rather than the riches of the world. In this way, we become firstfruits believers.

We are firstfruits believers; but then we are also to *express firstfruits* in every season of life.

It is apparent, then, that we can have all four ‘grounds’ of responses in our hearts. However, we believe that we are changing from one degree of glory to another as we give attention to and respond to the word.

Our name in Christ the Seed

What does it mean for the seed, who is Christ, to *germinate* in the heart of a hearer?

In our last session, we learnt that the *name* of every son of God is in *Christ the Seed*.

It is not that God has a big bag of seeds containing everyone’s individual name.

Rather, Christ is the Seed in whom is written everyone’s name as a son of God.

Our name defines our identity and works

The first action of God the Father is to name us as His son or daughter when we receive Christ into our heart.

This name of a son of God is the complete word that defines our identity and works for eternity.

This is an amazing point. The name of a son of God is not merely a title; it is not a designation stating that you are a son of God.

Your name is *the complete word that defines your identity and works for eternity*.

The important point to understand is that you have your identity because you were born as a son or daughter of man.

However, that identity is *redefined by the word of your sonship* which God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit counselled about even before the foundation of the world. That is the word of your name.

The word of our sonship

The Scriptures reveal the fact that there is the word of our name. There is a beautiful passage that many of us will know well, which describes the word of our sonship.

'Your eyes saw my substance [I love that, because the eyes are the flame of fire, the fellowship of Yahweh; and, in that fellowship, the substance of who you would be was seen by God], being yet unformed [before any literal realisation of you as a person]. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when *as yet there were none of them.*' Psa 139:16.

What is the 'book?' The book contains the word - and Jesus is the Word of God. Written in the book is the detail concerning your sonship, or name, which is written in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Book. This is the detail that is contained in the word of your name.

Their thoughts toward our sonship name – more than the sands of the seashore

Then David said, 'How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!' Psa 139:17.

We could read this as, 'How precious, O God, were Your thoughts about me when You thought about who I would be as a son; when You wrote my name in Your book'.

'How great is the sum of them! *If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with You.*' Psa 139:17-18.

What a beautiful thought! The thoughts about each individual are *more* than all the sand on all the shores of all the beaches of the whole world. A great deal of thought has gone into you and your sonship.

Do you see that the grief of the Father in relation to the loss of all His children is not only that we have *gone away from Him*?

It is that we have *chosen to define ourselves* in a manner that is much less than what He predestined and planned for each one of us.

It is the grief of settling for a life that is far less than what He had determined for you.

I can barely keep about ten thoughts in my head at one time. If He had more thoughts about us than the sand on the shore, surely we should

rejoice when we hear the word that defines a sonship which is greater than anything that we can comprehend.

Defining ourselves is darkness; no glory

Do you see that we need to let go of our own definition of ourselves, which is foolishness?

Do you see that it is foolishness to rely on your own understanding?

Truth is found in the word of the Father, which is a beautiful, ongoing revelation of the word of your name that contains more detail than the sand on the seashore.

When you receive the word and it germinates within your heart, you must then 'fill it out' as a son of God in Christ.

When a person receives their new-born name in the seed of the word that is proclaimed to them, their human identity is redefined by that name.

If you do not have that word of your name, you will still have identity, but you will endeavour to name yourself or to reveal your own identity.

Do you see the distinction between the glorious grace coming with the word of your sonship, and the fallen loss of redefining yourself according to your own understanding?

That is the gap between what God has prepared for those who love Him, and those who live according to the principles of the fall.

God's word defines us and we are made new

When that seed comes and we are born again, our identity is redefined. It is no longer defined by us; it is defined according to what God had predestined for each of us.

This is the point of *regeneration* where a person's spirit is reborn.

The evidence that a birth, or germination, has occurred is that the shoot of a plant grows out of the ground. When we are born of God, a *substantial change* occurs.

We are no longer only a son or daughter of man; we are a completely *new creation*. The Scripture teaches us this.

There is an old creation, and there is a new creation; and when the seed germinates in our heart, the ground of our heart changes into something else.

The 'ground' becomes a 'plant', if you like.

Do you see the point? We can still be likened to ground, but it is the plant, a shoot, that is *seen*. God gives growth to this plant because we are His sons.

At this point, we have received *the divine nature* as our life; and we *are a son of God*.

This happened when the Father proclaimed the word to us, and we did not resist the grace that came with the word.

Made alive from the death of self-definition

Another amazing point is that, once a person has been born and their life as a son has been redefined by the word of their sonship, they have been *made alive from the death of living according to self-definition*.

When Adam and Eve rejected fellowship with Yahweh, they were cut off from God and lived according to the desires of their own heart. That was *death*.

When you receive the seed of your name as a son of God, you are made alive again, as a new creation.

However, to obtain your eternal inheritance, you, as a newborn son of God, must die again. This is the principle of *baptism*.

Joined to His death; dying with Christ

Unless we *die with Christ*, we will become separated again from the *life* of God.

The life of God is only multiplied to become our life as we maintain a committed participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

We must move from receiving the seed, to a place where life is *multiplied* to become our life. That is the *fellowship* of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Do you see that you can be born again but, unless you are joined to the context in which His life is multiplied, you will die again? His life is multiplied by His shed blood.

Take up your cross

Jesus made this point as accounted in the book of Matthew. 'And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it.' Mat 10:38-39.

You found your life when you were born as a son of God. But you must then take up your cross and *follow Christ*.

But *where* are you to follow Him? It is on the pathway of sonship that He has pioneered through His offering and sufferings

'And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.' Mat 10:38-39.

Multiplication of life

This life is like a seed germinating, coming up out of the ground, but dying again.

There is only enough life in the seed for it to germinate.

Then, for that new creation to come to full maturity, we must have the life of Christ *multiplied* to us *through the fellowship of His offering and sufferings*.

Multiplication through Christ's death

Christ was made to be sin, in the garden of Gethsemane, when He drank the cup of cursing that the Father gave to Him.

This is a beautiful point that we have come to understand about the message of the cross. When that happened, *Christ died to God with us*.

But then He came back from the death – from *our* death. He was born from among the dead by the blood that fell from His body.

He was the Son; then He was conformed to our death.

But then, *by the shedding of His blood*, He came back from the dead. And this was not only for Himself.

Indeed, He came back with a great multitude of sons called 'a sheaf of firstfruits'. We will develop this point in a couple of weeks when we talk about the meaning of firstfruits.

Exanastasis – the life we live

His blood contained the life of the Father, and this resurrection life was *in His blood*.

Paul coined the term *exanastasis* to describe this life. It is the resurrection life of God in a mortal body, by which He came up from the death of sin.

It is not only our 'old man', dead in its carnality and sin, that was crucified with Christ, as though we leave our old man with Christ and are then disconnected from His offering and sufferings.

Rather, we must be conformed to the fellowship of His death so that our old man can be removed from us. This is the principle of our baptism. As a son of God with new creation life, we die with Christ in the fellowship of His baptism, which becomes our baptism.

Zoe life is exanastasis life

Paul said, 'For you died [when you were baptised with Christ], and your *life* is *hidden* with Christ in God.' Col 3:3. Paul spoke of dying with Christ in baptism.

The life that Paul spoke of was *zoe* life, which is the Greek word for 'the life of God'.

This is *your sonship life*.

When you were baptised, and died with Christ, your sonship life, or the *zoe* life of God, became yours and was *hidden with Christ in God*.

Think of that for a moment. You have been born; your sonship is being manifest; you are dying with Christ - but *the life of your sonship is hidden with Him in God*.

And, when Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Hidden with Christ in God, revealing Him; entering His kingdom

If you want to grow to the fullness of sonship that God has prepared for you, you need to understand what it means to be 'hidden with Christ in God' and then to 'appear with Christ in glory'.

It means that *we do not reveal our own glory*. We reveal *Christ*.

When we are hidden with Christ in God, our sonship life is no longer ours to express as we see fit. Do you see that this is the point of distinction between being born to *see* the kingdom of God, but then the need to *enter* the kingdom?

We can be born of God and obtain our sonship, but can then say, 'I want to live my sonship in *this* way.'

When we do that, we *fail to enter* the kingdom, as it reveals that we have not accepted that our life is meant to be hidden with Christ in God. To be 'hidden with Christ in God' means that we are not to reveal our sonship as we see fit.

This is the distinction between being 'born to see', and the reality of what it means to 'enter the kingdom of God'.

Our life is no longer ours to express as we see fit. The life which we now live in the flesh is *Christ's life*.

'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.' Gal 2:20.

This is the life that I obtain by continuing to hear, receive and obey the word of the Lord that comes to me.

It is this point - the reality of being born and entering the kingdom to reveal Christ - that is a point of stumbling for us, and is the issue of 'stony ground'.

The Holy Spirit is the firstfruits of our sonship expression

Having been born from above and hidden with Christ in God, we are also given the Holy Spirit as the *firstfruits* of our eternal inheritance as a son of God. We do not receive the full expression of our sonship, which we have received as a seed, but we receive the Holy Spirit who enables us in a *firstfruits* measure.

Firstfruits is the first portion of an entire harvest. We could say that it is the first handful of sand from the sand of the seashore. We have received the Holy Spirit, who is the firstfruits of our inheritance as a son of God. The Holy Spirit is the firstfruits of our eternal inheritance. Rom 8:23.

Within the Godhead, He enables the expression of our life as those who remain hidden with Christ in God.

You may wonder how your sonship is seen if you are hidden with Christ in God and your life is not revealed.

It is *revealed by the Holy Spirit*.

He is the expression of your sonship. That is beautiful. He is the *Helper*.

The Holy Spirit leads us into all truth

In his Gospel, John declared that the Holy Spirit will *lead* us into all truth. Joh 16:13. Part of what this verse means is that the self-definition of our

name is a lie, and is the basis of a deluded perspective.

It is amazing that the Holy Spirit has been given to us to lead and to direct us in that way.

In fact, He is at enmity with the exercise of our flesh. He is absolutely committed to you and to me, to bring forth the fruit of the Seed of which we have been born. This is why the Helper has been given to you and me for.

We have the capacity of Eternal Spirit

How does He do this?

The Holy Spirit *joins* us to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, *enabling our participation* in Christ's offering in the same way that He enabled the Son's offering.

He gives us the capacity of Eternal Spirit. That is amazing.

The pathway that Jesus walked is the pathway that we are to walk as we 'take up our cross'. Jesus walked that pathway by the capacity which He received from the Holy Spirit. That capacity is called Eternal Spirit. Heb 9:14.

The Holy Spirit gives that same capacity to us so that we can be joined to Christ and can receive the life made available through His offering. This happens as we grow up as a firstfruits son or daughter of God in Christ.

By the Spirit, we can *fulfil the works* that were prepared for us in Christ as we are delivered from our propensity to walk according to the principles of the flesh.

As we walk in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, our fleshly propensity is removed from us in the circumcision of Christ.

It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to remain *connected to this fellowship*.

As that way of the flesh is being taken away from us, the Spirit Himself is enabling *the expression of His life*.

The work of the Holy Spirit

There are, therefore, two things that the Holy Spirit does.

On the one hand, the flesh that impedes our life is removed from us.

Additionally, He enables *our expression of the life* that we receive in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

We are a temple for the Holy Spirit. This means that He resides in us, He priests in us, and He is revealed in us as He reveals the life of Christ through us.

Do you see that this is the *fellowship* of offering? It is one revealing *another*; not us revealing ourselves.

When we are born of God, we are joined to that life and culture of God by the Holy Spirit. This is why the New Covenant is called 'the covenant of the Spirit'. It is called 'the New Covenant of the Spirit'.

Fruit in our lives versus stony ground

This is fundamental to our being a firstfruits believer. The term 'firstfruits' means that the life of which we have been born has *germinated* in our heart and has *brought forth fruit*. This is the firstfruits of the Seed that we have received.

To be a firstfruits believer is to be *born* of the Spirit, and to *walk* according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh.

In contrast to this, the issue of having a heart of stony ground is whether we will continue to walk by the flesh, which includes our desire to name and reveal ourselves.

Will we walk by the Spirit or by the flesh? This is the issue of stony ground.

Walking in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings

As we journey each day with Christ in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, sin is put to death in us, and the other law is circumcised from our heart.

Furthermore, Christ's *exanastasis* life brings us back from the death of sin, and is multiplied to us to become our life.

This is the ongoing reality of *walking in fellowship with Christ* every day. He 'priests' to us our *participation in His offering*.

From stony ground to fruitfulness

Paul summarised the transition from stony ground to fruitfulness in his letter to the Ephesians. This was his prayer. Every messenger of Christ should pray this prayer for the sake of

those who hear the message, which is Christ the Seed coming to every individual.

'For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ [he was praying to the Father], from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.' Eph 3:14-16.

As this happens, our spirit, or identity, is regenerated so that that Seed can be received into the ground of our heart and can germinate, or take root.

The culture of faith

You may be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man so that Christ, the Seed, may dwell in your hearts by faith.

The term, 'by faith', reveals a way of living.

The spirit of faith is the culture that directs the way in which we converse and conduct ourselves.

Christ dwells in our hearts as we live and walk and have our conversation in Him.

Rooted and grounded in the love of God, in the body of Christ

'To be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love.' Eph 4:16-17.

Do you see that stony ground indicates a person who has no root in themselves? The Seed does germinate, and brings up the first expression of new life, but it has no root.

And what does it mean to 'have no root in yourself'?

It means to be rooted and grounded *in the love of God*.

For the seed to germinate and to form a root in the heart means that you hold on to fellowship in *the context of love*, which is *the body of Christ*.

To be rooted and grounded in love is not so much an individual or a personal reality.

Rather, it is that you are personally *connected to others* who are rooted and grounded in love.

What happens when you are rooted and grounded in love? Then you can see differently so

that you can comprehend, not only personally, but also *with all the saints*.

Do you see that being rooted and grounded in love *connects* you to all the saints?

'That you ... may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge'. Eph 3:18-19.

Hidden in Him, knowing the love of God

This love passes all your natural understanding, and is where 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him'. 1Co 2:9.

This reflects the fact that germination of the seed has happened, and that the reality of your life is found in Christ.

Are you willing to be '*hidden* in the body of Christ'; or do you desire your sonship to be revealed according to your own way?

Do you want to *enter*, to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, so that you may be filled with *all fullness*?

It is wonderful to be talking about 'firstfruits', but God's desire for you and me is for all the *fullness* of God to dwell within you; not in only a firstfruits measure, but in all fullness.

The evidence of stony ground - disconnection from the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings

We will consider the issue of 'stumbling', because that is the critical point to do with the stony ground.

In the illustration of the stones, the seed going in, and the germination, in the end, the reason why the seed 'dies away' is because a person stumbles.

Jesus explained that the evidence of stony ground within us is our *disconnection* from the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Remember that to 'enter' is to be *joined* to the offering and sufferings of Christ. This is being 'rooted and grounded in love'.

Offering is the expression of love. You can be no more rooted and grounded in love than joined to the *fellowship* of His offering *with all* of the other saints who are part of a great cloud of witnesses.

Stony ground – relational offence

Before we consider further what it is to stumble, I want to make a point about stony ground. I have often thought that stony ground describes our offence at our experiences of suffering; but, in truth, that is a secondary reality.

Stumbling actually has to do with *relational offence*, which is exacerbated when we are suffering.

Stony ground is not so much about suffering, because we know that *everyone* suffers, whether they are a Christian or not.

Jesus said that tribulation comes because of the *word*, so that means suffering is an inevitable implication of the word of the cross.

So, the reality is that suffering, which is an inevitable implication of the word of the cross, reveals within us the propensities which cause us to stumble.

It is not that we suffer and then stumble; it's that there is a propensity within us to stumble, which is highlighted when we suffering.

Stumbling – falling on His pathway

What does it mean to 'stumble'?

To 'stumble' means that we lose our footing and almost fall, in the course of walking. No-one stumbles simply by standing. We stumble when we are *moving*.

We see that stony ground has to do with the *pathway* of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Last session, we understood that wayside ground is the 'side' of the 'way'. This describes a person who is no longer walking in the *way* of the cross that Christ has pioneered for them.

On stony ground, a person has been born of God, the Seed has germinated, and now they are *on* that *pathway*. And, as they are walking on that pathway, something causes them to stumble. Can you see that they are actually *on* the pathway, but that they lose their footing and are almost *falling* on the pathway.

Stumbling – relational; fallen from first love

Here is a key point.

Stumbling is not only that you, in the course of your life *as a son of God*, somehow fall into sin. You may have a poor response to a circumstance or

you may abrogate your walk in some way. That is not, in the first instance, what stumbling means.

Stumbling is a *relational* phenomenon.

It is the inevitable implication of *not being rooted and grounded in the fellowship of first love*.

Stumbling – disobedience to the word of sonship; offence at Christ

Why is this the case? It is because of *disobedience* to the gospel of sonship.

Pulling those threads together, it is the inevitable implication of not being rooted and grounded in love - in the fellowship of first love - because we are disobedient to the gospel of sonship.

We've chosen either our way or the way of another 'gospel' as the definition for our life.

The apostle Peter highlighted the fact that this relational reality is actually *stumbling at Christ Himself*.

It is being offended by *Christ*.

Stumbling is actually to do with *offence*. It is when we become offended in the course of our walk on the pathway of sonship that has been pioneered for us.

'Therefore, to you who *believe*, He is *precious*.' 1Pe 2:7.

'How *precious* are Your thoughts, to me, Lord!' Psa 139:17. That is the response of a person who *believes*.

'Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are *disobedient*, the Stone which the builders rejected has become the Chief Cornerstone, a stone of stumbling and a rock of *offence*.' 1Pe 2:7-8.

To the one who is walking in the word which is being proclaimed, all the thoughts that are revealed through the word are precious. They *delight* in the way of the Lord.

For most of us, that is generally how we are walking. However, when we are disobedient to the word, for one reason or another, we are resistant to what the Holy Spirit is saying.

Christ Himself becomes to us a stumbling stone and a rock of offence. The word itself offends us.

'They stumble, being disobedient to the word to which they were also *appointed*.' 1Pe 2:8.

Being 'appointed' refers to your 'calling', or 'sanctification', *as a son of God*.

Peter was saying, 'You received your word and were born of an incorruptible word by the living and abiding word of God, an incorruptible seed; and that was appointing you to your sonship.'

In the course of walking in that sonship, there is a disobedience that causes us to stumble at Christ; to be offended by Christ Himself.

'They stumble, being disobedient to the word.' This is the word of our sonship.

Then he said, in the positive, 'But *you are a chosen generation*.'

Drawing back from our priesthood in Christ

A person who is offended is actually drawing back from the *priesthood* to which they have been anointed with the Spirit - the *anointing* that teaches us how to abide in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

So, you have an anointing, and you need no-one to teach you how to walk as a son of God in Christ. 1Jn 2:20.

You delight to walk as a son of God in Christ, but resistance may occur. This is the flesh being at enmity with the Spirit.

'A royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness and into His marvellous light; who were once not a people, but are now the people of God [the children of God or the sons of God], who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.' 1Pe 2:9.

Offence at our brethren is the denial of Christ coming in flesh

Those who stumble in this matter don't believe that they are stumbling because of Christ. Remember that Christ Himself is a stumbling stone; a rock of offence.

In the course of our sonship life, something may cause us to be offended. But we won't attribute that to Christ.

However, we will attribute it to what *someone* said or did to us in the body of Christ, and it causes offence.

We think, 'It is not Christ; it is *them*.'

What are we denying? It is the denial of Christ coming in the flesh of our brethren.

The apostle John said that when we deny Christ coming in the flesh of our brethren by saying, 'I'm not offended at Christ, but I am offended at you', that is the spirit of antichrist. We do not trust and believe that Christ is coming in the flesh of our brethren.

Offence in the course of offering; a work of the flesh

This is an important point. What is causing our offence and what are we offended at?

Those who stumble in this matter don't believe that they are stumbling because of Christ. Rather, they are offended by what *someone* in the body of Christ has said or done to them, particularly in the course of *offering*.

This offence may be because their offering initiative was not accepted.

This is a person who has been born of God, and has then said, 'I'm a son of God; I would like to participate in *this* way.'

This is *revealing themselves* or *defining* how their life is going to be revealed. And, when this is not accepted, that person is wounded and becomes offended.

Perhaps they were not received in the way that they had expected or wanted.

In reality, the word of the gospel is not consistent with their expectations of who God is and what the Christian life should entail, so they become offended by the gospel because it is not what they imagine it should be.

This is seeing life through the perspectives of the flesh.

The reason why we become offended is because of the nature of our 'sight'. As we've been considering in this season, to see in this way is to walk according to the sight of our own eyes and according to the understanding that comes from our other law. Of course, we've understood that Jesus called this, 'darkness'.

Judging a brother without a cause; walking in darkness

John helpfully pulled these threads together to highlight the relationship between *darkness* - our disconnection from fellowship; our offence with and disconnection from our brother - and *stumbling*.

'He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in darkness until now.' 1Jn 2:9.

Why do they hate their brother? It is because they are *judging* their brother without a cause.

'Without a cause' simply means from the basis of their own other law. They believe that they are in the light; they believe that they are receiving the word and are walking in the word - but they have been offended by someone in the body of Christ.

In this regard, John said, 'If you say you are in the light, but hate your brother, you are in darkness.'

'He who loves his brother' is a person who is laying their life down to reveal another. 'He who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in Him.' 1Jn 2:10.

So, if you hate your brother, that is the cause of stumbling. It is your judgement of that person. And stumbling is the offence that's happened because we are in the dark.

'But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.' 1Jn 2:11.

Do you see that, if you are on the path and cannot see where you are going, you are very likely to stumble?

You are very likely to trip, because you are walking by *the sight of your own eyes*. This issue of flesh versus Spirit is very important here.

Offence from a deluded perspective; darkness

And the point of stumbling will be in relation to *how* we are interacting with our brethren in Christ.

The evidence of stumbling is grumbling, complaining, and griping about a brother without a cause. It's agitation because of relational disconnection.

The one who is stumbling just can't let go of what a person has said to them or the way in which they believe they have been treated.

This is offence. They are holding on to offence, which is causing them to stumble in their walk.

Often, the wrong that has been done to them is imagined. Why is it imagined? It is because they are seeing the offence from the basis of a deluded *perspective*.

That is darkness. If they are walking in darkness, it means that they are walking by a deluded perspective. They perceive their interactions with another from the basis of a delusion, and are imagining that what is said is a wrong against themselves.

Judgement by the stones of our law

This is simply the judgement of circumstances from the basis of the 'stones' of our law, which are based in good and evil.

That is 'judgement without a cause'. It is hating our brother without a cause. Our 'causes', or judgements, are derived from our other law.

Judging by the compelling love of God; no longer living for ourself

It is not the judgement made *by the love of God*, which is poured into our heart by the Holy Spirit.

Do you see that when we judge from the basis of our own perspective, and from our other law, we are *not* rooted and grounded in love?

If the love of God has been poured into our heart by the Holy Spirit, and we are rooted and grounded in love, we may still make a judgement, but it is not a judgement *about another person*.

The love of God compels us to judge in only one way - and what is that way? It is that *one died for all, then all died*.

Do you see that if you are judging in any other way, it is not by the love of God?

Paul went on to say that if one died for all, then all died. He was explaining that this continued judgement is also the *judgement that they should no longer live for themselves*, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

We may say, 'I am happy to die for Christ, but I'm not all that happy to die for the one who has offended me.'

If you believe that, you don't believe that Christ is coming in the flesh of your brethren. That is darkness.

If you now are judging yourself by the Spirit, and judging that you no longer live for yourself, but for Him who died for you and rose again for you, then you are living for your brethren in Christ, because you believe that He is coming in your flesh.

Do you see the difference between judging without a cause, which is by the other law, and is a delusion and darkness; and judging by the love of God, by the Spirit, which compels us to see ourselves joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings?

A root of bitterness makes us lame

A person who stumbles relationally has rejected the word of God and those who minister this word to them.

Consequently, they are unable to *fellowship* with those who proclaim the word to them. They have rejected the Lord's people.

Do you see that they are *not* rooted and grounded in love?

Sadly, in place of being rooted and grounded in love, a different type of root will grow up. It is called 'a root of bitterness'.

It is the circumstance that you just cannot get past, and where you cannot interact with a person. And, if that is so, then you are stumbling. You are stumbling, and you are at risk of your sonship falling away. In fact, this stumbling, this offence, is lameness.

Think about this. If you are lame, you can do nothing but stumble. A lame person is actually stumbling along.

We have to be hearing a word, and being willing to confess our faults to one another, particularly those by whom we are offended. Then they can pray for us, and we may be healed of our lameness, and not be turned out of the way. You see, the 'way' is very important here.

Suffering because of the word of God

This is the beginning of the suffering. If you have been offended, that is suffering because of the word - and suffering is inevitably because of the word of Christ.

Why is that so? It is because that word 'fell into the ground and died'.

If you have received it, you will endure the same *fellowship* of sufferings that He endured.

In fact, the whole world is, suffering - that's the amazing point. Everyone is under that same condemnation. We are either under condemnation and are going *out* of the kingdom, or we are baptised into His death and are letting go of all those fleshly propensities, and are coming up as a *new creation in Him*.

This is *suffering because of the word*. When we receive His word, we are joined to *fellowship* with Him. This is the fellowship of His offering and sufferings.

Receiving the faith of the Son of God

Those who do not receive faith because they are offended by the messenger have difficulty receiving the word from one who has been sent with the gospel of grace. They do not receive that messenger, which means that they are not receiving the word. Thus, they are not receiving *the faith of the Son of God*.

They have no capacity, in the context of suffering, to *endure with Christ*. For those who do not receive faith because they are offended by the messenger, suffering exacerbates their victim mentality. They believe that they are a victim of either something someone said or something that someone did, and then the context of their suffering exacerbates their agitation and griping.

For those who have received faith in the word, the fellowship of Christ's sufferings is the means by which they are *being delivered from the other law*.

They are also being *enabled to see and walk* in the way more clearly.

Gaining wisdom and understanding

This principle is taught to us in relation to wisdom and understanding. This was a focal theme last week.

We need to cry out for wisdom; to give our ear to the word; and to lift up our voice for understanding.

This is the reality of one who wants the culture of the word to become the culture of their life. Simply, this means that the word enters their

mouth as their *conversation*, and enters their 'feet' as their *conduct*.

'The Lord, by wisdom, founded the earth, and by understanding He established the heavens. By His knowledge, the depths were broken up and the clouds dropped down the dew.' Pro 3:19-20.

'My son [the sons of God], let them not depart from your eyes [Don't let go of wisdom which has been proclaimed by the word, and don't cease from crying for understanding.]. Keep sound wisdom and discretion so that there will be *life to your soul* and *grace to your neck*.' Pro 3:21.

Having 'grace in your neck'; not fear and agitation

If you don't have grace 'in your neck', you will be stiff-necked, and a person who is stiff-necked is easily offended. Every time that the word calls them to turn, they can't quite turn. They are stuck with their own darkened perspective.

Grace to your neck enables you to turn to receive the light of the knowledge of the glory of your sonship. That's a beautiful thought.

'My son, let them not depart from your eyes, keep sound wisdom and discretion, so that they will be life to your soul and grace to your neck. Then, you will walk safely in your way and your foot will not stumble. When you lie down you will not be afraid.' Pro 3:21-24.

A person who is stumbling is fighting for life. They are *motivated by the fear of death*.

However, if you are receiving wisdom and understanding, and are not letting them depart from your sight, when you lie down, you will not be afraid. 'Yes, when you lie down your sleep will be sweet.'

Do you see that a person who is stumbling and offended is constantly *agitated*? They just can't let go of their griping. They can't get past it. It actually affects the way in which they relate with other people as well, and this becomes a point of stumbling.

And, they don't realise that they are actually stumbling at *Christ*.

He doesn't want us to walk this way. He wants to deliver us so that we can bring forth *the fruit of fellowship*.

All may stumble because of another law within our hearts

Here is something that we all need to accept. We *all* stumble at times because we all can become offended because of the law within our hearts.

To say that we don't stumble is to say that we have no sin. John said that if we say that we have no sin, we lie and do not practise the truth. It means we are not being led by the Spirit.

We need to accept that we *all* have a propensity toward stumbling, because we *all* have another law.

Delivered from and recovering from stumbling

How do we walk in such a way so that we are being *delivered* from this propensity to stumble?

How do we *recover* when we do stumble?

This is another way of saying, 'How do we deal with the stones of our heart so that we bring forth good fruit?'

We do not need to fall away. In fact, even our stumbling is an initiative of mercy from God to cause us to turn again to Him. Paul spoke to the Jews, but the principle applies to us all.

'I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?' Rom 11:11.

He was saying, 'Have the Jews stumbled so that they should fall away and be forgotten by God? Certainly not.'

Now, remember that we *all* stumble. So, when we stumble, it's not so that we should fall away and be forgotten. That is *not* what God has in mind for us.

And He is not standing, as we walk in the way, waiting for us to stumble so that He will 'flick us off into hell.' That's not what is happening.

Remember that He acknowledges that there is lameness that is causing us to stumble; and He is coming to *heal* us.

He said, 'I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not. But through their fall [and we *will* fall from time to time], to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.' Rom 11:11.

Do you see that, when we do stumble - and we should register when we're feeling offence - it is a

point where we should turn to the Lord? It is a provocation from Him. This is actually the Spirit Himself at enmity with the flesh of our own way.

Do you see that when you are feeling offended, it is not the other person's fault?

This is the time to turn to the Lord and to cry out for wisdom and understanding.

Turning again to the Lord, in fellowship

The key to recovery from stumbling is to turn again to the Lord, which means to look into the face of our brethren in Christ, and probably into the face of the one with whom we are offended, and to receive *the light of the knowledge of God* that shines into our heart.

Remember, this is *the word of Christ*, which is being proclaimed from a presbytery. For what purpose?

It is so that we might have *fellowship*.

When we are offended, we are actually stumbling at Christ, and He is causing us to draw back from fellowship. In this case, we are not rooted and grounded in the love of God.

John said, 'That which we've seen and heard, we are declaring that word to you, that you also may have fellowship with us.'

This is where we are to be rooted and grounded.

Abiding in His love

'And truly our *fellowship* is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, and these things we write to you that your *joy* may be full.' 1Jn 1:3-4. That is beautiful.

When we are first born as a son of God, immediately we spring up with *joy*. But that joy fades when we are offended, and stumble.

John was saying, 'We are continuing to proclaim the word of sonship which grants grace so that you may turn and have fellowship with us, so that that joy which you initially experienced when you were born again may become full.'

This means that you obtain the full inheritance of your sonship.

Jesus said, 'As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you. Abide in My love.' Joh 15:9.

'Rooted and grounded in the love of God'; 'abide in My love.'

How do we do that?

'If you *keep My commandments*, you will abide in My love.' Joh 15:10.

The word is coming, and when that word is jarring to us, we must not turn away from it. This is where we need to find *repentance*. This is a gift granted to us. This is *grace* coming to the humble.

Do you see why to be poor in spirit and broken-hearted is a *blessing*?

It is because then we are easily able to *receive* this word.

We are *abiding in love*.

We are obtaining our *inheritance*.

'If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.' Joh 15:10.

It is no different from what Jesus demonstrated. He is the Pioneer, and the way that we are *following*.

This is walking *in the way*, isn't it? We abide in His love so that we don't stumble.

From stony heart to fruitfulness

He said, 'These things I have spoken to you that my joy may remain in you [not fall away] and that your joy may be full.' Joh 15:11.

This is us transitioning *from stony-heartedness to fruitfulness*.

Choosing our sonship and fellowship

Now, diligence is required on our part to *choose sonship*, and to *choose fellowship* in the body of Christ.

This is how we are *born of water* to enter the kingdom of God. This is what it means to live as a citizen of that heavenly city.

'Therefore brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure.' 2Pe 1:10.

What is your 'calling'? Your calling is your *sonship*. It is *the word of your sonship*.

And 'election' is you being in your place, connecting easily with other people in the body of Christ - *fellowship*.

It is the Father Himself who places us in the context of the body of Christ.

For what purpose? It is so that we can lay our lives down for one another.

‘Therefore brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.’ 2Pe 1:10.

We do not remain with a heart of stony ground.

We are enabled to put off these propensities that cause us to be angry and to hate our brother without a cause.

‘If you do these things you will never stumble, for so an entrance will be supplied to you.’ 2Pe 1:11.

This person has been *born to see*, and has obtained an entrance into the kingdom of God.

‘For so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.’

Praise the Lord! Let us understand stony ground, and all continue to put off our lameness which causes us to stumble, so that we can *continue to bring forth fruit*.