



On The Frontier



“For The Glory of God and the furtherance of the Gospel”

Vol X No.4

July/August 2002

Rock Of Ages Cleft For Me

The origins of my exposure to Christianity may be different than some. In fact, even the union of my parents was somewhat distinctive. The background of each was as dissimilar as can be mused. Dad was born in the mid-west and grew up on a farm in Missouri. Whereas my mom was born in Manhattan, NY. Dad’s heritage was Irish and Netherlands Dutch, Mom’s Italian and Greek. A varied and uncommon collusion to say the least! You can be sure that culture did not compliment my parents when they first engaged one another. But what was perhaps most strikingly different about them was their religious roots. My maternal grandfather was Greek and as such raised a Greek Orthodox. But my grandmother, being Italian, was Roman Catholic. This provided a religious tug-of-war for Mom. Consequently, she spent many years in a “religious flux.” She had a spiritual thirst that lingered throughout her youth. Thankfully, her spiritual thirst was quenched in the last for it was she who ultimately led me (and many others) to Christ. This tumultuous fusing of culture and religion left my folks in a quandary regarding me. Their dilemma being; “What religion shall we raise the boy?”

Since my paternal grandparents had long passed there was only the maternal ones to consider. (Believe it or not years ago the grandparents were consulted and honored in these matters.) Discrepancies and confusion

continued to abound so my folks chose to raise me as a Baptist. Only THEY didn’t often go to church with me. But I attended faithfully. Of course, that was then and this is now. As you may have guessed, I ascribe to no religion and maintain no organizational confederacies. Praise God for that! Nevertheless, I consider myself blessed to have had such unique beginnings in these matters.

Church made several impressions on me and left a “bad taste in my mouth” concerning religion. Remember now, Christianity is NOT religion. Religion is what men do and Christianity is what God did when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead and what He does in you when you believe on Jesus Christ. Christianity should be thought of as the relationship of a loving Father with His children. The rest of the religious world is nothing more than a convoluted manufactured mess. Notwithstanding, there must be some truth if anything is to stand, even in religion. Consequently, my church experiences did have meaningful highlights. God can work wonders in spite of the circumstances surrounding us. For me, one such wonder was found in song. So many of my valued memories are celebrated in hymn. Truths I’ve come to love and rely upon were oft times found in the lyrics of the songs we sang at church.

One of the hymns sung frequently in the church I attended as a child was “Rock Of Ages.” This hymn is quite well known and still enjoys tremendous popularity in many of today’s church congregations. Of late this tune keeps coming back to my

mind. I seem to find myself humming it in the quiet recesses of my heart. “Rock of ages, cleft for me . . . Let me hide myself in thee . . .” There is a magnificent truth in the lyrics of that old hymn! So often I’ve run to God for refuge. How about you?

Psalms 62:1-8

Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him *cometh* my salvation.

He only *is* my rock and my salvation; *he is* my defence; I shall not be greatly moved.

How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall *shall ye be, and as* a tottering fence.

They only consult to cast *him* down from his excellency: they delight in lies: they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly. Selah [pause and consider this deeply].

My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation *is* from him.

He only *is* my rock and my salvation: *he is* my defence; I shall not be moved.

In God *is* my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, *and* my refuge, *is* in God.

Trust in him at all times; *ye* people, pour out your heart before him: God *is* a refuge for us. Selah.

God is our Rock! The rock of our salvation and strength. Not only can we trust in Him all the time, but we

can pour our hearts out before Him as well. He is our refuge!!! "Rock of ages cleft for me, Let me hide myself in thee." Oh how I love that old hymn!

The hymn, "Rock Of Ages," was written by Augustus Montague Toplady. He lived a short but productive life (born in 1740 and died in 1778) of only 38 years. But what a time to have lived! Consider what he witnessed. For one thing, the birth of these our United States of America. Of all the nations ever conceived this is the only one with a base document promising freedom of worship. One must wonder how his mind and heart received such a concept. Surely it was novel for his time, but the struggle for spiritual matters was not. Toplady was a man of reformation living in a time of reform, even as we. The Reformation began on October 31, 1517, when German monk Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. From this action modern day Protestantism was born. This is because the Reformation was based upon the rejection and hopefully the modification of doctrine within the Roman Catholic Church. No modification of significance took place and so was born the Protestant movement. However, when one examines the reasoning behind Martin Luther's efforts it is clear that his was a pursuit of Scripture. There is nothing in history to indicate that Martin Luther was in any way concerned with founding a new denomination or religion. His was a purist venture solely based upon his spiritual hunger. It is interesting to note that the English word *Protestant* is derived from the compound Latin word *protestari*. *Pro* meaning *forth*, *for* or *in favor of* and *testari* meaning *to call to witness*. Were we to look at the word protest (root of Protestant) from a positive rather than a negative

perspective we would find it to mean *pro Testament*. Clearly, in the context of spiritual matters one who protests must be in favor of putting forth God's Word. Of course our vernacular use of the word protest is generally negative. And as for the true meaning of Protestant, obviously that one is hopelessly lost.

There are those who believe the Reformation began the last great revival of true Christianity in world history and the countdown to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course we know that the countdown to the Lord's promised Return began with his Ascension and not with anything the rest of us have done. Even a man as wonderful as Martin Luther must be considered inadequate in this regard and honestly speaking, 1517 makes him a Johnny-come-lately. As to revival, it is also evident that there can be no true revival without reformation. We must then ask, what is reformation? To reform is to amend what is defective, vicious, corrupt or depraved. To do so one must remove or correct what is abusive, wrong or in error. This is true for any pursuit. Witness politics in the form of the Reform Party. Earlier I mentioned the birth of our Nation being founded upon the freedom of worship. This was, of course, a reformation of a Christian nature. I'm told that the Reform Party does in fact have conservative Christians among its membership. Obviously reformation of political matters has not reached conclusion. I find it reasonable to also conclude that the same can be said for Christian doctrine and practice. The latter being the impetus for Toplady's penning of "Rock Of Ages." It seems this wonderful hymn was first found in an article he wrote in "The Gospel Magazine" discrediting some of the teachings of John Wesley. Apparently Wesley

upheld Arminianism and Toplady did not. Arminianism is described by the following:

1. FREE WILL

Arminius believed that the fall of man was not total, maintaining that there was enough good left in man for him to will to accept Jesus Christ unto salvation.

2. CONDITIONAL ELECTION

Arminius believed that election was based on the foreknowledge of God as to who would believe. Man's "act of faith" was seen as the "condition" or his being elected to eternal life, since God foresaw him exercising his "free will" in response to Jesus Christ.

3. UNIVERSAL ATONEMENT

Arminius held that redemption was based on the fact that God loves everybody, that Christ died for everyone, and that the Father is not willing that any should perish. The death of Christ provided the grounds for God to save all men, but each must exercise his own "free will" in order to be saved.

4. OBSTRUCTABLE GRACE

Arminius believed that since God wanted all men to be saved, He sent the Holy Spirit to "woo" all men to Christ, but since man has absolute "free will," he is able to resist God's will for his life. He believed that God's will to save all men can be frustrated by the finite will of man. He also taught that man exercises his own will first, and then is born again.

5. FALLING FROM GRACE

If man cannot be saved by God unless it is man's will to be saved, then man cannot continue in salvation unless he continues to will to be saved.

Jacobus Arminius lived from 1560-1609 and so was enormously affected by the writings of Calvin. Arminius jealously guarded his faith and its

doctrine. Consequently he is known for being in dispute with Calvin regarding the nature of salvation.

Arminians challenged the church with their new beliefs: 1) The freedom of the human will; 2) Conditional election by God, based upon His foreseen faith in men; 3) Christ's death was designed to save every man, and whatever it accomplished it accomplished for all men equally; 4) Saving grace is resistible; it is generally given to all men equally and so may be refused; 5) Those who do exercise their will to be saved may later lose that faith and be lost.

In response, the Calvinists reaffirmed that: 1) Man is totally depraved; everything about him, including his will, is negatively affected by the fall of Adam. 2) God elects whom He will save unconditionally; He places no conditions upon those whom He chooses but acts sovereignly. 3) The death of Christ, while completely sufficient to save all men, was designed specifically to save the elect. 4) When God moves in a sinner's heart to bring him savingly to Christ, He succeeds infallibly; His saving grace proves irresistible. 5) All those who are saved will persevere in faith forever.

Amazing isn't it? How so much confusion could bring about such a magnificent hymn? Yet it did! How tragic, Toplady and Wesley in dispute over the doctrines of Christianity! Debate, condemnation and scrutiny over the Divine as seen through the eyes of each man.

Wesley's doctrines further exacerbated matters as he believed the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason. Had he left out tradition, personal experience and reason he would have

really had something. But he didn't. The result is seen in the denomination that sprang from his teachings. That being United Methodist. Ah yes, we have a method for everything as seen in the following quote from the denomination of the same name:

"United Methodist preaching and teaching is grounded on Scripture, informed by Christian tradition, enlivened in personal experience, and tested by reason."

Considering the varied approaches to Scripture embraced by the aforementioned, it's little wonder they clashed as they did. But is the time we live in any different? No! There are vast numbers of divergent doctrines amongst today's Christians. Often it seems argument and debate are the order of the day rather than love and understanding. Nevertheless, reformation is good, very good. Without it we will never see revival. If only we would stick with the original axioms as set forth by Luther.

The 4 Pillars of the Reformation:

Christ Alone!
The Bible Alone!
Faith Alone!
Grace Alone!

The 3 "R's" Christ Risen, Reigning,
Returning soon!!

Men of the Reformation such as Luther have left us a legacy and an obligation to uphold the Truth. They weren't perfect but they were undaunted. Consider the words Luther spoke while on trial for "blasphemy."

"I cannot submit my faith either to the Pope or to the Councils, because it is clear as day they have frequently erred and contradicted each other. Unless therefore, I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture . . . I cannot and will not retract . . . Here

I stand, I can do no other. So help me God, Amen"

The threat to his life was very real as the Romish Church was THE political power. Religion ran politics then as it does now. Little has changed. How sad that Luther's followers made a denomination out of his efforts, something he begged them never to do! And how marvelous that Toplady wrote his article containing "Rock Of Ages" in 1776. No coincidence there, to be sure! His thoughts and beliefs summed up in verse.

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to your Cross I cling;
Naked, come to you for dress;
Helpless, look to you for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die."

I don't know about you but I'm not one to "throw the baby out with the bath water." While I do not agree with the major portion of the things these noted men set forth, I find something of value in each. I do try to adhere to this wonderful tenant:

I Thessalonians 5:21

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

After all was said and done, Arminian, Calvinist and numerous believers world wide have been blessed for over 200 years by "Rock Of Ages." The truth contained in it transcends religion. The same has been a personal reflection of mine since youth and a continual comfort to my soul.

Exodus 33:12-23

And Moses said unto the LORD,
See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let

me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight.

Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation *is* thy people.

And he said, My presence shall go *with thee*, and I will give thee rest.

And he said unto him, If thy presence go not *with me*, carry us not up hence.

For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? *is it* not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that *are* upon the face of the earth.

And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name.

And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.

And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.

And the LORD said, Behold, *there is* a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock:

And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by:

And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.

Moses stood upon the rock, he put his face in the clift of it and the Lord God Almighty passed behind him. This impacted Moses so dynamically that his face shone to the magnitude that the children of Israel could not behold him!

Exodus 34:29-35

And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him.

And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him.

And Moses called unto them; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him: and Moses talked with them.

And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh: and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him in mount Sinai.

And *till* Moses had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face.

But when Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he took the vail off, until he came out. And he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel *that* which he was commanded.

And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the vail upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

This event is spoken of again in the New Testament.

II Corinthians 3:2-ff

Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:

Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward:

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God;

Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

But if the ministration of death, written *and* engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children

of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which *glory* was to be done away:

How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

For if the ministration of condemnation *be* glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excellet.

For if that which is done away *was* glorious, much more that which remaineth *is* glorious.

Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:

And not as Moses, *which* put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which *vail* is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.

Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

Now the Lord *is* that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there is liberty.

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The veil that once was upon the faces of Israel is now upon the hearts of many. A veil that prevents them from seeing God and His glory. When your heart turns to the Lord the veil is taken away, for it is taken away in Christ. When you read God's Word your heart must be open to His Christ. Sadly there are many today who have closed their hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ and thus God's Word remains a closed book to them.

Moses could not look directly at God, no man could then and no man can now. But with his face in the cleft of a rock he could get a glimpse of God's glory.

I Corinthians 10:1-6

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat;

And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should

not lust after evil things, as they also lusted

The spiritual Rock that followed Israel was Christ. The promise of the coming Messiah was with them as God's Word records. God's promise to man regarding redemption and such would be fulfilled in His Messiah and the Scriptures are permeated with this truth. It is abundantly clear in the Holy Writ that no man shall see God without the Lord Jesus Christ! No man saw Him before the Lord's Coming and no man shall see Him with out accepting the Anointed One of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

John 1:18

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.

The cleft of the rock that Moses put his face in was a shadowing of what the Almighty knew would come to pass. That rock represented THE Rock, the Lord's Messiah, Jesus the Christ! In a sense Moses was face-to-face with Jesus Christ, a glimpse of yet another future reality.

I Corinthians 13:9-12

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

For now we see through a glass,
darkly; but then face to face:
now I know in part; but then
shall I know even as also I am
known.

How else could God have revealed
Himself to Moses? There is no other
way to the Father but by Jesus
Christ. Though the Lord Jesus had
not yet been born in Moses' time,
God in His foreknowledge and love
revealed this to His people in various
and sundry ways. One such way was
having Moses put his face in a rock
cleft so as to make it safe for God to
reveal Himself to him. Wow!

I John 3:2

Beloved, now are we the sons of
God, and it doth not yet appear
what we shall be: but we know
that, when he shall appear, we
shall be like him; for we shall see
him as he is.

There is a day coming when we shall
see Jesus Christ as he is and what a
day that will be when we see our
Lord face-to-face!

Truly we can say with great joy as
did the Psalmist:

Psalms 40:2

He brought me up also out of an
horrible pit, out of the miry clay,
and set my feet upon a rock, *and*
established my goings.

Therefore, we need to be as this man:

Luke 6:47,48

Whosoever cometh to me, and
heareth my sayings, and doeth
them, I will shew you to whom he
is like:

He is like a man which built an
house, and digged deep, and laid
the foundation on a rock: and
when the flood arose, the stream
beat vehemently upon that house,
and could not shake it: for it was
founded upon a rock.

If we call Jesus Lord then we must be
diligent to DO the things he said. To
live any other way is to live on
sinking sand.

I Corinthians 4:1-7

Therefore seeing we have this
ministry, as we have received
mercy, we faint not;

But have renounced the hidden
things of dishonesty, not walking
in craftiness, nor handling the
word of God deceitfully; but by
manifestation of the truth
commending ourselves to every
man's conscience in the sight of
God.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid
to them that are lost:

In whom the god of this world
hath blinded the minds of them
which believe not, lest the light of
the glorious gospel of Christ, who
is the image of God, should shine
unto them.

For we preach not ourselves, but
Christ Jesus the Lord; and
ourselves your servants for Jesus'
sake.

For God, who commanded the
light to shine out of darkness,
hath shined in our hearts, to *give*
the light of the knowledge of the
glory of God in the face of Jesus
Christ.

But we have this treasure in
earthen vessels, that the excellency
of the power may be of God, and
not of us.

The knowledge of the glory of God can
only be had in the face of Jesus Christ.
His face is plainly depicted in God's
matchless Word. For the Word of God
makes known the Lord Jesus Christ
and the Lord Jesus Christ makes
known God! There is no other way. It
is God's Way, for Jesus Christ is the
Way, the Truth and the Life. No man
comes unto the Father but by him.

“Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Save from wrath and make me pure.”

Should I pass before the Return, no
Mathisites, Linusonions or
Frontiersians. Don't even think about
it!!!

Psalms 61:2

From the end of the earth will I
cry unto thee, when my heart is
overwhelmed: lead me to the rock
that is higher than I.
