



1 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; 2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat; 4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. 5 But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. (1 Cor 10:1-5)

There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. (1 Sam 2:2)

Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me

*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,
cleanse me from its guilt and power.*

*Not the labor of my hands
can fulfill thy law's demands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears forever flow,
all for sin could not atone;
thou must save, and thou alone.*

*Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to the cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Savior, or I die.*

*While I draw this fleeting breath,
when mine eyelids close in death,*

*when I soar through tracts unknown
see thee on thy judgment throne,
Rock of ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee.*

That Ancient Rock of Ages was not Peter, or any Pope, but the Lord Jesus Christ! There is no Vicar of Christ that stands in His stead – He forever stands for Himself, and none can take His place. Both the words and music (Petra) were written by Augustus Montague Toplady in 1775. The words have been described of the most concise embodiment of the whole of the Word of God in beauty, in majesty, in meaning, and in intent. The blessed Bishop of Manchester, John Charles Ryle, has described the hymn in the following words: *“Of all English hymn-writers none perhaps has succeeded so thoroughly in combining truth, poetry, life, warmth, fire, depth, solemnity and unction as Toplady has done.”* This hymn is bursting with biblical truth, doctrine, faith, and humility. It rejects the popular myths and false doctrine that has arisen around the identity of the Rock which was Christ. Let us examine this beautiful and greatly loved hymn of the ages.

The first stanza possesses the force to evoke hot tears from the depths of our souls. How is it that Jesus Christ is the Rock of our Salvation, and how came He to be cleft for us?

*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,
cleansing me from its guilt and power.*

Was that Ancient Rock cleft for us? *“But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.”* (John 19:33-35) That great wound, made once the totality of our debt was paid, penetrated all of the way to the very heart of Jesus – a heart that overflowed with love and forgiveness for all who would come and gaze upon Him in faith. The cleft of the side of Christ, just as the tearing of the Temple Veil from top to bottom at the same instance, removed yearly sacrifice of oxen and sheep, and completed a better sacrifice that would suffice for all sins. We now have access to the Heart of Jesus through the means of faith through grace. Certainly, that blood and water which literally flowed from the side of our Lord is sufficient to cover every sin confessed and repented. Many stood very close to Christ at that dramatic Crucifixion in Time when “He gave up the ghost.” But many of those very close to Christ never received the benefit of that shed blood for their wicked hearts were darkened; but others, such as the women disciples and John, and you and me, all have received the benefits of that salvation created at the cleft side of our Lord Jesus Christ. Are we not washed by the blood of Jesus, and are we not kept clean and pure by the Water of His Word?

That rich, red blood of Jesus cleanses us so that our sins, though scarlet, will be made white. How white, you may ask? Well, according to the Psalmist, *“Whiter than Snow.” “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”* (Psalms 51:7) I will remind the reader that hyssop is a purgative that cleanses the bowels. God cleanses our inward soul first, and then washes the outward appearance. Having that imputed righteousness of Christ, we shall then appear – not

white as snow – but WHITER than snow. Every snowflake requires a tiny speck of impurity in the upper atmosphere around which to coalesce, but we are made even whiter than that snowflake because God will regard no speck of impurity in our hearts once we are covered by the blood of Jesus.

*Not the labor of my hands
can fulfill thy law's demands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears forever flow,
all for sin could not atone;
thou must save, and thou alone.*

Have we followed the grand error of Rome in believing that we may be saved by our righteous works? We can do nothing to save ourselves – salvation is all of Christ! ***“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*** (Eph 2:8-9) Thank goodness, this is true since no man can live a sinless life of good works. The law demands complete justice, and even a single sin will send us to Hell. ***“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*** (Romans 6:23) All since Adam have come under the sentence of death for our sins – either great or small. The sentence must be paid to satisfy the Law. Christ saved us, under the terms of the Law, by paying our penalty in our stead. All of our tears, all of our fervor for righteousness, cannot save us. Only the pure righteousness of Christ can suffice for us.

*Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to the cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Savior, or I die.*

It should come as no shock to the informed readers of this devotion that we shall carry nothing of this world with us through those glistening gates of Heaven. ***“Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”*** (Job 1:21) The dash in our lives is most important – not the day of our birth, or the year of our death, but the dash in between. When I visit a new church, I like to go first and look at the fathers of the church who sleep in the Lord. Some will read June 3 1943 – 14 August 2004. Though the two years are important, it is the dash between that represents the life of the Christian. If that dash is comprised of golden deeds from an unselfish heart, then we shall leave this life to go naked to God in order to receive those riches laid up in store in Heaven's bank account. God will, like the father did for the Prodigal Son, bring forth the best Robe – the best because it is the Robe of Christ that covers our sins – and cover our nakedness. Our works, however, are not the means of salvation – only grace! We are not saved BY good works, but UNTO good works. We are as the thirsty doves that cross the parched deserts of Arabia bound for the brooks of Lebanon. If we come not to the flowing Fountain of Life, we perish in the Wilderness of Sin. If we are not washed of our sins by the blood of Christ, we certainly will, as the Rich Man who forbade his crumbs to poor Lazarus, die in our sins, be buried, and wake up in the fires of Hell.

*While I draw this fleeting breath,
when mine eyelids close in death,*

*when I soar through tracts unknown
see thee on thy judgment throne,
Rock of ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee.*

Dear reader, whether you choose to know it or not, you are presently drawing a fleeting breath. Tomorrow's sunrise is no guarantee for any of us. Our eyelids begin to close in death the moment they are opened in childbirth. The energies of life and growth work in opposition to the aging process which progresses steadily until we arrive at that 'room of dying' which will be at the moment of our Lord's own choosing. The sands of the hour glass continually fall. We behold the sands in the bottom of the glass, but the remaining grains in the upper chamber are hidden from our view. Every soul born upon the earth has an appointment to meet face to face with our Maker. There are no exceptions! Some will appear to be judged for their sins and who have no Advocate to defend their cause. Such sinners will be cast into the same Lake of Fire reserved for Satan and his angels. But the man or woman, forgiven and restored in Christ, will have an Advocate with the Father – the Lord Jesus Christ – and the Adversary will be conspicuously absent for he has already been defeated and judged. How do you anticipate your defense at the moment of the appointment forthcoming?

There remains an aspect of truth revealed in this hymn that I have not yet covered, and that is the nature of the follows of Christ whose salvation is dependent upon that ancient Rock of Ages. Why did Christ tell Peter: ***“That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it?”*** (Matt 16:18) Does this mean that Peter is the foundation of the Church? By no means does Christ intend that meaning. Peter is strong, yet weak in moments of separation from Christ. Christ is the Foundation and Rock upon which the Church is established, and He is the Head of His Bride the Church. So what does Jesus mean in making reference to Peter as “this rock?” Are not all children chips off the old block of their fathers? Are not Christians to bear the nature, though imperfectly, of Christ? A chip from the Rock of Ages should yet possess the nature of the great Stone from which it is hewn. Even a chip from a Rock is still a rock, isn't it? We should be like Him. Are we?