

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Isn't that where we find ourselves much too often, between a rock and a hard place? Decisions, decisions! Every turn of our daily travel seems to bring us to a fork in the road where a decision must be made as to which direction to proceed. If we could only stop time, climb a tree or pole so as to look further ahead to see which road is the best, but we can't. Time moves on and so we must make a choice, sometimes a blind one, and move on. But often we perceive that we can see both ways for some short distance. One alternative may appear smooth and easy going and the other rough and difficult. Here the choice seems easy to make; we take the easy one. However, for some reason, as we make "easy" our criterion for choice, we find ourselves suddenly stuck in a section of road too difficult to pass through. That's when we often describe ourselves as being between the proverbial rock and a hard place. Now what to do? We must move on. For most, the hard place doesn't appear to be as difficult to deal with as does the rock. Therefore we choose it and start rationalizing our way through so that we can proceed to the next choice as time propels us on through life. Can you relate to this? Of course you can, that's life!

Where am I going with this you ask? Well eventually, I expect to get to Matthew 7:22-28, which is a very hard place and one we can and must avoid encountering. I also want to bring in John 14:6, and perhaps other verses I haven't thought of yet. Now, knowing where I am heading, you can see that this is a spiritual road we are talking about. Just as our physical journey through life has many forks along the way where we must make choices, and also many "rock and hard places" to get by, so also does our spiritual road. However, our spiritual road will be much darker, more difficult, and fatally dangerous to navigate until and unless we are blessed with a guiding light, and a protecting power. Absent these, we are doomed to continually taking the wrong turns, and making bad decision that inevitably lead to the condition described in Matthew 7:22, 23. That is because at every rock and hard place, the carnal soul will always chose the hard place, the way that seems easier to deal with than the rock, which they find too intimidating. From a worldly conditioned viewpoint, the rock almost always seems to be the place to avoid.

However there is not one speck of spiritual enrichment to be found in the hard places, only darkness, and the journey's end always being that described in the above referenced verses. So what is the answer? The answer from the spiritual perspective is to go counter to earthly ways, and turn to the Rock instead as the way past each difficult place. Our Scriptural justification for this choice is found in Matthew 7:24-27 where Jesus cites the parable of the man who built his house on the rock and another who built on sand. In the context of this study, the sand may be considered the hard place. Several times, Scripture says this "Rock" is symbolic of Jesus. Always go for the Rock, because it is the only sound foundation on which to find eternal security.

Consistent with the parable however, if when we come to that tight spot between the rock and the hard place, and chose the rock, a glorious thing will happen! This is because the Rock is Jesus, the light of the world and the foundation that will never fail! (1Corinthians 10:4) Once we make that choice, once we repent from our former seemingly easier "hard place" choices, His light will illuminate our lives and show us the way to the place of love, acceptance, and eternal life. All who take the "easier" way will be those poor, wretched souls mentioned in Matthew 7:22, 23, who built their lives foundation on sand. They chose the easier "hard place way" rather than the "Rock way."

Those of us who have spent our lives dealing with the "hard places" instead of the "Rock" have been yielding to Satan, and to the temptations of the world, preferring the easier path that he offers. Once we choose the way of the "Rock," the light of God's truth will reveal the blessed path we will then want to follow. However, it is certain to be a more difficult path, because Satan's world will increasingly and deliberately place stumbling blocks before us, and tempting signs pointing to "easy streets." God's love and His strength however, will always be with us to help us keep on His "way," to pick us up whenever we do stumble, and to lead us back, whenever we veer off toward "east streets." If we do continue His way to the end, we are assured that we will never hear Jesus say "I never knew you; depart from me ye that work iniquity." But instead we will hear words such as those recorded in Matthew 25:21 where Jesus says "well done thou good and faithful servant."

By now, I believe that I've stretched this little cliché' about as much as it can take, so now let us look at the referenced verses to see more directly what God has to say about this matter. We'll try to look at them through the eyes of KJV translators as they put them to paper as follows:

Matthew 7:21-28 "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings the people were astonished at his doctrine."

Just because we speak to God, calling Him by name, doesn't mean we are saved. We can do many things that we believe are what God wants, and what will cause Him to be merciful, and also provide us with His grace of salvation. Here Jesus tells us we can even prophesy in His name, cast out devils and do many great works, but He says that won't do it. Prophecy doesn't necessarily mean to foretell events. Its first definition is simply to speak by divine inspiration. Quoting Scripture, even with great passion and knowledge won't necessarily do it. Cast out devils doesn't necessarily mean exorcising evil spirits. It can simply mean throwing away our idols, or our false gods such as movie stars and football players, but that won't do it. We can devote our lives to feeding the poor, helping the sick, earning a PhD in theology from Harvard, or teaching Scripture, but that won't do it.

He tells us what will do it in verse 21b “...*he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven...*” It is as simple as that! Eventually, it boils down to one thing, unquestioningly faithful OBEDIENCE, that is doing the will of His Father with our entire being. What is obedience? What ingredients are there that boil down to this one requirement? In the fewest possible words, they are recognizing the need for a Savior, acknowledgment of our condemning sins, repentance, humility, belief, faith and love. That’s the salvation stew called Obedience!

Notice Jesus said “...*not everyone who...*” That means that some “*who...*” are saved. Therefore we can conclude that each of the enumerated efforts have merit, but only for saved souls, those who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and then become obedient to God in accordance with the ingredients found in the “obedience stew.”

After uttering the most devastating words any person could ever hear in verse 23, Our Lord then presents the parable that I’ve likened to a “rock and a hard place.” In verse 24 Jesus speak of the wise person who hears what He said and obeys. This person is the one who chooses the rock on which to build his or her life on. The rock of course is Jesus. When we have chosen Him as our foundation we are guaranteed that the Rock will never fail us, not even during that final storm of judgment as we enter into the eternal realm. There He will forever remain our Rock. However, as we see in verses 26 and 27, whoever chooses the “hard place,” the sand, on which to rely, is a foolish person. Foolish in the Greek is “*moras*” which also means, dull, stupid, heedless, and absurd. Take your pick, they all apply. That person’s foundations may seem to survive the comparatively minor storms of life, but that final storm, the judgment storm will wash him or her away and out into the outer darkness with all who “work iniquity.”

Finally let us take a quick look at 1Corinthians 10:4, John 14:6, John 10:27 and John 8:12 in order to work our way out of the “rock and a hard place” portion of life’s journey, and into the freedom Jesus offers, In 1Corinthians 10:4 Paul reveals how the spiritual drink came from a spiritual rock, “...*and that Rock was Christ.*” In John 14:6 Jesus say “...*I am the way, the truth and the life no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*” In John

10:27 Jesus says, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me.”* In John 8:12 Jesus says, *“...I am the light of the world, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”*

Now let us put all of these together in the context of the many forks in life’s road, the darkness of the road, and the choices we must make when we reach those many places where we must somehow have to traverse between a “rock and a hard place.” With reference to the quoted verses we find that Jesus Christ is the Rock; He is the truth and the way to the Father God. He knows all who are His, and all who are His know Him and follow Him. Jesus is the light of the world, and for those who choose Him, the Rock will always emit the guiding spiritual light! Once we have chosen the Rock, the hard places will no longer be our choices. The omnipresent Lord Jesus will be everywhere in our lives, never as an obstacle to be avoided, but will be our Savior, our Strength, our Guide, our Light, our Protector, and our Escort to our eternal dwelling in the heavenly places. As long as we travel with Jesus, forks in the road will no longer seem ominous confusing, or points of serious concern or confusion. As long as we are in Jesus, and He is in us, we will never choose the wrong fork, for His light and guidance will always show us the right way.

All of humanity, sooner or latter, and often, will come to one of those spiritual “rock and a hard place.” If you are a redeemed Christian, you need only to pray to the Rock. He’s been eagerly waiting for you to petition Him. If you come to Him in repentance, humility, belief, faith and love, He will never be an obstacle to be overcome, because for you, He already overcame everything. He is therefore your All in All, for He is all that anyone really needs. Amen.