

# Is A Rock Just A Rock To God?

by **Bill Keesee (1935-2010)**

**Forerunner, "Ready Answer," July 2001**

*" . . . you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house . . ."—I Peter 2:5*

Why does it always seem that the one person who can most easily get our dander up is in the right place at the right time and doing all the right things to get under our skin and cause us no end of grief? Such people often seem to know just the right thing to say or do to hit one's "hot button" and ruin a perfectly good day. And how often has such a disaster occurred on God's Sabbath day at church services?

Something like this has probably happened to just about everyone in the church. If not, the rare exceptions are probably already perfect and have no need to read this article. In fact, to many of us this scenario seems to be more the rule than the exception! And there are some good, spiritual reasons why this is the case.

At one time, when we attended larger churches, it was easy to avoid those who rubbed us raw or at least rubbed us the wrong way. Now, however, when we meet with just a handful of brethren, we are forced to deal with them every week. This kind of situation has the potential to become volatile and offensive. Conversely, it also creates an opportunity for growth.

## **Polishing Rocks**

Our family had an experience while on vacation one summer many years ago. We were visiting the quaint and beautiful little mining town of Silverton, Colorado, nestled in the shadow of the San Juan Mountains. The prime attraction in Silverton is the narrow gauge steam train that makes a daily trip from Durango.

Up and down every street are many shops trying to sell the tourists any and everything they can, as this is their only source of income. At one of these shops, a man was polishing and cutting rocks. While watching him, I noticed a five-gallon bucket with a belt pulley on its bottom, sitting at an angle on some rollers. The pulley was being driven by an electric motor, causing the bucket to rotate on the rollers. The bucket was filled with rocks, most of which were covered with a heavy crust of limestone. The rocks sat in water, which created a slurry substance as the rocks tumbled and the outer crust began to erode away.

Having never seen this process before, I asked the man to explain what was taking place. He said that in order for him to get to the beautiful rock that lay beneath the surface of the outer crust, rather than take each rock to the grinder, he simply let them grind against each other until the crust was gone. The constant tumbling motion also removed most of the rocks' flaws or made them easier to work with.

He also explained the purpose of the water and why the slurry was so important. The limestone crust itself, when mixed with the water, made a natural solution to act as an abrasive in completing the process of polishing the outer surface. Some minor polishing and buffing finished the process. The stone, once an ugly, crusty, hard rock, had now become a thing of beauty.

It became evident that, as these rocks agitated in the spinning bucket, some of them clashed against the others with enough force that one or more would be thrown out. When this happened, the stone seller picked up each stone that had fallen to the floor, examined it, and put it back in the tumbling bucket to continue the job of cleaning it up. After all, his livelihood was invested in each rock he could polish for sale. He tried to save every one he could.

This story illustrates a similar process God puts His children through to build His righteous character in them. If we can catch the vision of what God is allowing us to experience to help us become something of real beauty to Him, then we may well be more appreciative of the trials we often think are so difficult. Paul, speaking from much experience, says, "No trial is of the moment easy to bear, but the fruit produced from it is far greater than we can now understand" (Hebrews 12:11 paraphrased).

### **The Gem Beneath**

God surely knows our weaknesses, but He also knows what hides under the surface, what will be exposed only when the crust has been scraped off. He knows that our bumping and grinding against each other is necessary for us to learn to become forbearing and patient and willing to accept the differences we each have.

God did not make us all "yellow pencils." He knows we are not all made from the same cast, and that the different personalities we have will enhance the beauty of His Creation, once our various strengths and talents are channeled in the right direction. Not all flowers are red; many various colors make a beautiful bouquet. The physical creation we see all around us should be clear evidence that God loves variety. How boring it would be if everyone thought and acted alike! He wants us to have and use our creative minds to create beauty from our particular perspectives.

Those of us who have more than one child are certainly aware how different each of them can be. Sometimes their thinking seems to come from opposite ends of the spectrum. While this may be a challenge to our childrearing techniques, it will also be just as challenging to steer each in the direction that will help them use their talents and abilities to realize their potentials. "Challenge" is the key word here. Their methods of doing things will often test our patience and make us bite our lips, but when they have accomplished their goals, we can stand back in awe and appreciate what they have achieved. God will do the same with us when He has caused us, through many trials, to reach the loftiest goal of all.

Many scriptures show stones to be something lasting, beautiful, lively or living. (e.g., Exodus 28:15-21; I Kings 5:17-18; 7:9-11; Isaiah 54:11-12; Malachi 3:17; etc.). In Revelation 21:19-20, God will use beautiful and precious stones in the foundation of the walls of New Jerusalem. Could God use a more fitting illustration when He inspires Peter to call His children "living stones," which He uses to build "a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, . . . acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (I Peter 2:5)?

Through Paul in I Corinthians 3:12-13, God says our work will be manifest by the type of material we use in building, whether of gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw. God will judge and try by fire everyone's work, and the durability of our "building material" will be exposed when that happens. Doubtless precious stones are enduring, for, as we have already seen, God Himself uses them as foundations in His own eternal city.

### **Tumbling in the Bucket**

Just as each stone was important to the man in Silverton, likewise each of us are precious to God, and He will do whatever it takes to prepare us for His Kingdom. How much He has to scrub off us depends on how stubbornly we resist the process of cleaning, shaping, and polishing. The more we yield to His efforts, the better and more thorough we will be prepared for His Kingdom.

When we are tested to the limit by someone—in light of what God is preparing us to become—does it not seem logical that we should be learning to be more patient, caring, compassionate, merciful, kind, gentle, and forgiving than ever, seeing that all these character traits express love for others? The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25 teaches us that expressing these things to our brethren is tantamount to doing them to God. Is this not what God is looking for in us?

God in His mercy is letting us tumble around in the bucket He calls His church. He has added water—His Spirit—to create a slurry, which represents all the trials we go through in life. His Spirit serves as a means for each of us to help polish one another. Like the stones, when they had all the crust removed and became smooth and nonabrasive to the other stones, we, when our human nature is completely removed in the resurrection, will be able to work with and appreciate the beauty of each other in a way we never could have before.

We can just endure trials others bring on us, or we can learn from them. God says He can raise up other stones to replace us if necessary (Matthew 3:9). But why should we fail with the kind of help we have available to us? The choice is ours. If we make the right one, our reward will be to share eternity with God and all the other beautiful stones He is now—and in the future—tumbling, shaping and polishing to use in the building of His spiritual house, the Family of God.