

## The Foot of the Cross

### Love at the Foot of the Cross

By [Octavius Winslow](#)

"Do you love Me?" He said, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." John 21:17

There is no place where the believer's love to Christ receives a diviner inspiration, a stronger and more healthful impulse, than at the cross of Jesus. The cross of Calvary is the altar of divine love- it is love in its most sublime, most touching and impressive form. No perfection of God is so conspicuous, precious, and transcendent in the redemption of man as love. "God is love," are words emblazoned upon the cross in letters of living light. It is true there was an awesome manifestation of justice, and a solemn display of holiness,

and a stern vindication of truth, and an overwhelming demonstration of power in the cross of Jesus; but divine love outshone and eclipsed them all. The cross of Jesus is love's portrait, love's exponent, love's sacrifice- the place where this divine plant of heaven in the believer's soul takes its deepest root, unveils its richest beauty, and breathes its sweetest fragrance. Having studied the graces of penitence and faith at the cross of Jesus, let us view in the same hallowed light the kindred grace of love.

Love to Christ is both the essence and the evidence of our Christianity; we thus become, as believers in Jesus, a reflection- faint, indeed!- of the essential nature of God. "God is love, and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him." There is not a truer or more powerful test of our religion than love. The fulfilling of the law and obedience to the gospel are resolvable into the same principle- the principle of love. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." "If you love me, keep my commandments." Such was the test to which our Lord subjected the attachment and fidelity of Peter. "Do you love me?" Detaching him from every other object, the Savior presented Himself as the one, sole absorbing object of His disciple's love. "Do you love ME?" Here was the divine magnet and its attraction. Never did our Lord propound an question more expressive and touching; and never did a disciple return an answer more responsive and precious. "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Beloved, the question and the answer equally concern us. To every professed follower the Savior addresses the same question. Does the reply of Peter find a response in our heart? Is it the echo of our feelings? Let us in faith approach the foot of the cross, and beneath its solemn light have close dealings with Jesus and with our own hearts touching

this vital matter- our LOVE to the Savior. To this test let us bring our affections, by it let us try our religion. Let us realize that Christ is addressing us individually- is addressing you, is addressing me- with, "Do you love me?" What answer are we prepared to return? Let me endeavor to aid you, beloved reader, in this momentous inquiry by placing before you, first-

THE OBJECT OF LOVE. "Do you love ME?" We admire and adore the wisdom of our Lord in giving this mold to the question- in presenting HIMSELF as the one engrossing object of love. He knew what was in man- how idolatrous was the human heart- how easily the needle of its love was disturbed by some other and less true attraction- how far an individual could go in the expression of a feeling that bore a strong resemblance of true love to Himself, but which, when tested, would be found false, and if cherished, would prove fatal! He therefore fixes the eye upon Himself. It is quite possible to admire and feel an interest in that which has some relation to Christ apart from love to the person of Christ. We may feel a regard for the minister who preaches Christ, for the edifice which echoes with the name of Christ, for the plans which make Christ known, and yet be destitute of love to Christ! President Edwards, in his masterly work on the "Affections," has clearly and solemnly demonstrated this. A diviner pen has yet more clearly and solemnly taught us that we may, "speak with tongues, have the gift of prophecy, understand all mysteries and all knowledge, have the faith that removes mountains, bestow all our goods to feed the poor, and give our body to be burned," and yet have no love to God or Christ!

The world has its objects of love, various and many- objects suited to each order of mind and standard of taste. The object of one is learning, of another science, of another ambition, with yet another it is the sordid accumulation of wealth. Thus might we traverse the whole circle and show you that every man has his idol; and that if God and Christ constitute not the supreme object, his heart, burning incense to some 'created object' which he substitutes for the God who created him, has never felt the attraction of divine love.

We come now to the consideration of the OBJECT of the believer's love. Christ invests the subject with no perplexity. He leaves nothing for our speculation, but clearly declares who is the true object of the believer's love. It is HIMSELF. What are some of the features in Christ constituting Himself as the object of the supreme, divine, and absorbing love of the believer? He is an object of love inasmuch as He is the great Revealer of God. Here the theology of some is defective, the views of others dim and low. They regard Christ as a wonderful being, of vast power, of ineffable love, of transcendent excellence, and tender sympathy, and this awakens their admiration and even inspires their love, but there they rest. But we dare not rest here. We must see more than this. We must see the Lord Jesus as the great MANIFESTATION of the Father, the embodiment of all the perfections and attributes of Jehovah. We must see Him as the exponent of the Father's love, or we cannot rest in Him with perfect satisfaction. How could we find repose in Him for our agitated spirits, and yet

cherish the dark suspicion that God did not look upon us with complacency, that there were perfections in God that were hostile to us; thoughts in the heart of God not reconciled to us? But the moment faith grasps the truth, "in resting in the love of Christ, I rest in the love of the Father; in finding a home in the bosom of the smitten One, I find a home in the bosom of Him who smote; and now I can travel as on the wings of light, up to the very heart of God, and feel in it the most perfect repose.

Sophistry and unbelief may urge me to cast away my confidence, but nothing can displace it, nothing can take from me the blessed assurance that, in resting in the atoning Savior, I am at peace with God himself. We ask you, then, if, as the great Revealer, He is not worthy of your supreme affection? You love the sun, for throwing his beams of light so gloriously over the face of nature. What enkindles that landscape with such beauty? What gives to the gems of the mine their luster, and to the flowers of the field their perfume and their tint? It is the glowing sun. How much more should we love Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, for showing us the Father, for revealing to us the glory of God; for blending all His perfections in their reconciliation and harmony. "He that has seen ME has seen the Father."

Equally is Christ an object of love for His own wondrous person. We love Him because He is GOD. We feel we are guilty of no act of idolatry when we bend the knee to Jesus, and offer Him worship and honor equal to the Father. We love to crown Him Lord of all, to trace His every display of power, and word of wisdom, and thought of love, to His veiled Deity. We love to feel that Deity atoned for us; we rejoice to know that Deity undertook, what humanity alone never could have accomplished, the full and eternal redemption of our souls. We love Him, too, for his HUMANITY- the humanity that was as real as ours, that was upheld by the indwelling Deity, that traveled to the cross, and hung and bled and died there. Oh yes! we love Him for all this. Who can contemplate Christ as the Eternal Son of God, exchanging the Father's bosom for the rude embrace of the cross to work out our salvation, and not feel "truly He is the object of my soul's supreme love."

We love Him, too, for His own work's sake, for what He has accomplished. Having voluntarily offered Himself a sacrifice for sin, He stood in our very place, entered into our prison-house, was bound with our fetters, assumed our debt, making Himself responsible to law and justice on our behalf. Ought He not to be the object of supreme affection? Is it not a wonder of wonders how we can contemplate His marvellous stoop, His atoning work for us, His self-sacrifice, and yet feel so little kindlings of love in return?

Nor must we overlook that which, perhaps, we are more prone to forget than anything else- we love Him, or ought to love Him, for His disciplinary dealings with us. This may be a hard truth for some to receive, who, with dark clouds draping their domestic hearth, toiling along flinty and dreary paths, borne down by care and anxiety and grief, are led to question the love of God in His dealings, and to inquire, "Can He love me and deal with me thus?" My reader, there is not

a single event in your history, or shadow on your path, or crook in your lot, that is not the fruit of the love of Jesus to you? Does He love your person? Has He pardoned and accepted you? Then, no more question His love in His afflictive, chastening conduct. He is dealing with you in your present trials with that very same love that constrained Him to die for you upon the cross. But the Lord tries the love of His people. Nothing is more clearly revealed in God's Word than the truth that, "the Lord tries the righteous." It is not for Himself that He tries them, blessed be His name! "The foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, the Lord knows those that are His;" and if the Lord knows you as one of His own, pardoned and justified, adopted and saved, He knows all your circumstances, there being nothing in your personal history of which the Lord who chose, because He loved you, has not a special cognisance. It is not for Himself that He proves His people, that He puts the precious ore into the crucible, tests and refines it. Oh, no! Delightful thought! you sheep of the fold, whom the world knows not, whom the saints do not know, who scarcely know yourselves, delightful thought! "I know my sheep," I bear them on my arm and on the palms of my hands; I know their names, I wrote them in the book of life; I knew them in the dark and cloudy day, when my Spirit went after them; I know my superscription, my image, my work in their souls. Blessed thought! Lord, comfort us with it, make us glad with the sweet assurance, "I know my sheep."

And yet, He tries them, He brings to the test every grace of the Spirit in the soul. But especially He tries the grace of love. He tries it by the test of our obedience. "If you love me"- what will follow?- "keep my commandments." Your obedience as my disciple is the proof of your attachment, the expression of your love to me." Is there a command of our Lord and Master irksome or distasteful to a true disciple of Jesus who feels his heart glow with love to the Savior? Not one! What would we think of the love of a child who would run in the face of parental authority, and yet protest that he loved that parent with an unfaltering attachment? Beloved, prompt, unquestioning obedience to any known command of your Lord and Master is a test of love to Him.

He tries our love, too, by service. Love to Christ will constrain the disciple to consecrate himself to the service of Christ. His is the love, not only of an obedient child, but of a faithful, dutiful servant; feeling that there are periods in his Christian life when he places his position as a servant even in advance of his dignity as a son. Thus we find the apostles commencing their epistles, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ;" "Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ;" "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ." Thus they placed their service in precedence of their apostleship, because they felt that a willing service for Jesus was a stronger proof of their love. If the Lord saw fit to place you in a position most obscure, or to assign to you a service the most menial, not calculated to catch the eye or win the applause, but rather the disregard and the rebuff of your fellows, it would be one of the sweetest tests of the reality of your love to Him. When Morrison, the Chinese missionary- the man of God who first gave the Bible to China in its vernacular- offered himself to the

directors of the London Missionary Society as a missionary to the heathen, his appearance was so uncultivated and unpromising, that, hesitating to accept him as a candidate, they inquired if he was willing to go simply as an assistant in one of the missionary schools? "Gentlemen," was young Morrison's noble reply, "while the temple of Christ is building, I am willing to be a hewer of wood or a drawer of water." In a moment they decided that a man who so loved his Savior, who was willing to undertake any service for Christ, was the fittest for the higher office of a missionary to the heathen. They accepted him as a missionary, and the result proved that they were not mistaken in their judgment. If, beloved, you love Christ, you will be willing to undertake any service your Lord and Master may appoint you. Love will make drudgery for Jesus pleasant and welcome.

Christ tries our love, again, by the test of suffering. "To you it is given on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake." We know these are not days of great persecution for Christ's sake- alas! they are to come- yet we know there is a moral martyrdom which many a disciple of Christ has to pass through who would bear the cross after Jesus.

The Lord sometimes tries our love by physical suffering. Many a child of God may be now tossing on a bed of pain, languor, and restlessness. Jesus has sent this sickness, designed but to prove the reality of love in its endurance. Love to Jesus will sweeten every cup He mingles. It will give repose to restlessness, alleviation to pain, and make all our bed in sickness. Thus, whenever the Lord sees fit to place you in a position of suffering, be sure it is but to try the reality of your love.

He tries it also by the test of principle. When our own interests clash with Christ's, and we are led to say, "Lord, though the temptation is enticing, I dare not yield for my right hand. I love your honor too well to do that which would compromise my integrity as a man of God, and dishonor Your great and precious name." This is the test of principle, and the evidence and triumph of love.

THE APPEAL the believer is able to make to the Lord for the sincerity of his attachment demands our next attention. "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Here was first an acknowledgment of the Deity of Christ. Who can "know all things " but God? Have you, my reader, a latent doubt touching the Deity of Christ? In the solitude of your chamber weigh this argument, examine this evidence, and see if it is not irrefutable and conclusive- that He must be essentially Divine who knows all things? All present and future events, all the hidden springs of action, all the concealed thoughts of the heart, all, all are known to Him who will one day occupy, clad in robes of majesty, the great white throne, unveiling every heart, and sitting in righteous judgment upon the actions of every life. He, then, who is to judge mankind in the last day must needs be essentially divine, must needs be God. We turn to His present knowledge of our love. Oh, what an entrancing thought! to be able to appeal to our Lord's Deity in proof of our love, and to say, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love

you." Have you not this conviction of the reality, if not the depth, of your love to Jesus? Dare you deny that you love Him? What! could you live without Jesus? Could you suffer without Jesus? Could you fence with the foe, vanquish and slay him, without Jesus? Could you do anything without Christ? do you feel no thrill of holy affection pulsating within your breast? What! do you not love His people, and love His truth, and love His service, because you love His person? Do you not say, "Lord, I dare not boast of the strength or constancy of my love to You; it ebbs and flows like the ocean's tide, yet, one thing I know- I do love you!" Then, deny not your love to the Savior, lest you wound His heart and grieve that Holy Spirit of love, by whose inspiration it was enkindled within your breast.

Having presented an outline of this subject, we return to the truth with which we commenced, and with which we close the chapter- love's place of nourishment and growth is the foot of the Cross. Where should our Christ-loving hearts repose but where Christ's loving heart bled? Our hearts should feel no magnet so powerful as the cross of Jesus, no attraction like the Crucified One. Look at this precious truth in two or three particulars.

The cross of Jesus inspires our love. It would seem impossible to be brought by the Holy Spirit to the foot of the cross, and not feel the inspiration of love. If love begets love, surely a believing apprehension of the amazing, the unparalleled love of Jesus, bending His look of forgiveness upon us from the cross, will thaw our icy hearts into the warmest glow of affection. Behold the source of your love to God! "We love Him because He first loved us." No throb of love had dilated our hearts had not God first touched them with His own. Believe in the love of God, believe that Jesus loves you, and you shall be sensible of a new-born affection glowing within your breast. You are not called to believe in your love to God, but in God's love to you! Do not argue, "I cannot love God! I have striven to my uttermost to do so, but have failed in all my endeavors, until in despair I have abandoned the thought and relinquished the attempt." Be it so- no effort of your own can strike a spark of love to God from your heart. Nor does God demand the task at your hands. All that He requires of you is faith in His love, as embodied and expressed in Jesus Christ to poor sinners. The new and living way He has opened to His reconciled heart, the ample promise He has made to save you, the willingness He has shown to pardon and accept you, the love, the astonishing, the marvellous love, He has exhibited in giving you His beloved Son to die in your stead, are cords by which He would draw your loving heart to Himself. Oh, will not this suffice? Have faith in God's love. Believe that Jesus loves you, and your heart shall glow with a love in return which will bear it on in a willing obedience and unreserved surrender, in faithful service and patient suffering, enwrapped, consumed amid the flames of its own heaven-inspired and heaven-ascending affection.

The cross of Jesus rekindles and restores our waning love. No grace of the Spirit is so sensitive to the influence of a chilling spiritual atmosphere as the grace of love. No divine principle of the soul sooner droops than it. "The love of many

waxes cold," is not the lament of one age of the Church only, it is her lament now. What are some of the producing causes? The influence of the world will chill it; the encroachments of temporal engagements upon the study of God's Word, the devout transactions of the closet, the ordinances of the sanctuary, will chill it; the society of half-hearted Christians- cold, worldly, light professors- will chill it; unfitting levity of spirit, trifling with sin, carnal pursuits, will chill it; an idolatrous love of the creature will chill it; fretting against the Lord, murmuring at His dealings, rebellion against His authority and chastenings, will chill it. Alas! how much there is to produce deep and sad declension in the love of our hearts to the Lord, and how soon its warm, flowing current chills and congeals! Oh that our hearts should so soon grow cold in their affections towards Him whose love to us is ever so warm, who ransomed us from hell with His own heart's blood! Let shame and confusion of face cover us. Let deep humiliation, tender, holy contrition, prostrate us beneath the cross, that we should for one moment gaze coldly upon so divine and gracious, so lovely and precious a Redeemer. But here is the remedy- the foot of the cross! Bringing there our chilled affections, our cold hearts, we rekindle the dying flame at this altar of love, and again, and with more touching earnestness and deeper sincerity, we exclaim, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you!"

It is at the cross of Jesus we shall prove more intensely the constraining power of Christ's love in our hearts. The great impelling motive of our holy obedience to Christ, and of all faithful service for Christ, is love. God would have our hearts moved towards Him by the same divine impulse that moved His heart towards us. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." This is to be the principle of our unreserved surrender to God- "The love of Christ constrains us." Desire we, then, to feel the all-commanding, all-persuasive, all-impelling power of love? Let us go to the foot of the cross and receive its inspiration there. Allow no motive to influence you lower than this. See that love to self, love to the creature, love for some fond idol is absorbed and lost in love to Christ. Yield your heart to the gentle yet irresistible force of love enkindled at the cross of Jesus. Love, there begotten, will give completeness to your obedience, cheerfulness to your service, sweetness to your cross. It will impart dignity to the most menial service, and pleasantness to the most toilsome drudgery for Christ. It will enable you to bow your head silently to the stroke that has laid you low- to drink uncomplainingly the cup from which perhaps now you shrink- resolutely to sever that tie that binds you to some absorbing idol and displaces your Lord- to relinquish, or take up, that which involves the honor and glory of Him who loved you unto death. Sit down, then, close at the foot of the cross- for there is nothing but love there- and love to Christ will attain the ascendancy; and, borne upon the bosom of its gentle, irresistible tide, obedience, service, and suffering for your Lord will be on earth your ambition, your joy and crown.

In conclusion. Do not be satisfied with vain and fruitless lamentations over the littleness and coldness of your love to Christ. Your love to the Savior will never

be nourished by feeding upon itself. It has no power of self-inspiration. Argument will not intensify it, reasoning will not increase it, lamentation will not quicken it. Love can only be enkindled at the altar of love. Look directly at the love of Jesus- get a more believing apprehension of His great love to you- leave the shallows of your own love, and descend into the depths of His love- light the torch of your affections at the flame which glows upon Calvary; and you then shall no more doubt the existence or lament the chill of your love to God in Christ, but, with a depth of feeling and a power of emphasis unknown before, you shall awaken the sweet echoes of heaven with your exclamation, "Lord, you know that I love you!"

It is only at the cross of Jesus that your heart will be perfected in love. And less than this is unworthy your aim. "We have known and believe the love that God has to us. God is love; and he that dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect." Thus perfected in love, knowing and believing of a truth that God loves you, the slavish fear that has produced so much torment will be cast out, and the sunshine of love will fill your whole soul with its divine radiance. And oh, how many beautiful rainbows will then pencil the dark, watery clouds of your earthly pilgrimage! You will see nothing but love in your trials, nothing but love in your sorrows, nothing but love in your losses, nothing but love in all your Father's dealings- for love's rainbow, arching and encircling all the children of God, bends its smile on you.

Remember the cross of Jesus is the place where we learn to love one another! Do we discover in our hearts any decrease of love to the saints? Do we detect a lack of charity, forbearance, forgiveness, fellowship, and communion towards God's people? Do we find sectarianism separating us, bigotry contracting us, misunderstanding alienating us, jealousy chilling us, misrepresentation prejudicing us, selfishness collapsing us? In a moment, without hesitation or debate, let us repair to the foot of Christ's cross, and before that marvellous spectacle of disinterested self-sacrifice, and bleeding, dying love, let the blush of shame crimson our cheek that we should ever look coldly upon, or speak uncharitably of, a brother or a sister enfolded in the arms that love extends, ransomed by the blood that love has shed! Beneath the cross of Jesus our shibboleths are lost in the music of love, our exclusiveness is enlarged in the expansion of love, our coldness, alienation, and distrust are dissolved and consumed in the heat of love- the love of Christ filling our hearts with affection to Himself, fills them with affection to His people. Prostrate before that cross, and reading your pardon there; surveying the price with which your ransom was secured, contemplating your deep obligation to the great love with which God has loved you, weighing what you owe as a debtor to the mercy that tides over all your transgressions; what sentiment other than love, forgiveness, and sympathy can you cherish for the saints who, though they may have wronged and wounded you, who, though they belong not to your communion, and differ from your creed, yet love the same Savior whom you love, and cling to the same cross that saves and shelters you?

Keep in constant remembrance the love of Jesus. "We will remember Your love," (Song Sol. i. 4.) Avail yourself of every occasion of trial, and sorrow, and temptation, and need to recall it to memory. Do not neglect the ordinance He has especially appointed to keep us in remembrance of Himself. "Do this in remembrance of ME." Remember all that His love has done and is doing for you now. Remember it in prosperity, to keep you humble; remember it in adversity, to keep you from desponding; remember it in loneliness, to sweeten your solitude; remember it in the night-watches, to raise your song; remember it in service, to animate and strengthen you; remember it in sickness and in death, and it will bear you home to that pure and bright world where, having learned to sing Christ's love at the cross, you will now chant its praise eternally before the throne!

"Oh! let me all forget but Thee,  
And Your deep love, my Savior God!  
Let every fond remembrance flee,  
But that which points me to Your blood.

"The fleet- the false- the fading dreams  
Of earthly joys, forever past!  
Which came and went like sunny beams,  
Too bright- too beautiful to last.

"Oh! let them all forgotten be,  
And You alone possess my heart,  
For I have all that life can be,  
If You Yourself to me impart.

"Who from the dazzling realms of light,  
Where hosts of angels owned Your sway,  
To bring me there, bore Sin's dark blight,  
And lowly came-a Child of clay!

"Who in my lost and rebel state,  
Forgetting You- asleep in sin,  
Raised me from death!- oh, love how great  
That I might life eternal win.

"That as a gem set in Your crown,  
I through Your grace might ever shine  
Oh! when I bow before Your throne,  
I'll think upon this love of thine.

"Yes, when I join the holy throng;  
I'll think of all Your love to me,  
And swell the sweet, the joyous song,

In telling what I owe to Thee!

"I'll think upon Your dealings here,  
How I was kept from hour to hour;  
How You did chase each trembling fear,  
And saved me from the Tempter's power.

"I'll think of days of sorrow too,  
When midst their darkness You did smile,  
And changed earth's sad and sable hue  
To holy light, for me the while.

"When piercing thorns pained my heart,  
And I had none my grief to share,  
I'll think how You did heal the smart,  
And calmed the grief that rankled there.

"Remember You! and all Your love-  
Changeless, when I too often have changed;  
Oh! memory, never let it remove,  
Until faith is into sight exchanged.

"Lord, so would I remember Thee,  
That, by Your love constrained to live  
Apart from earth, the world might see  
That heart and life to You I give.

"And while eternal ages roll,  
Your love shall be my ceaseless song;  
You who have saved my guilty soul,  
Praises to You alone belong.

"Who is there, Lord, on earth below,  
That I would with Your love compare?  
And when above Your saints I know,  
I'll love You still supremely there."

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