

The Foot of the Cross

Forgiveness of Sin at the Foot of the Cross

By [Octavius Winslow](#)

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them." Luke 23:34

The only question worthy a moment's serious thought is, "Am I pardoned? Are my sins forgiven?" The chief controversy between God and man is touching sin; if sin is pardoned- pardoned in a way that upholds the honor of God's moral government- the controversy ceases, and God and the sinner are in a state of perfect friendship. Now, it is the cross of Christ which alone exhibits at one view this truth in its fullest light. Oh, what marvels of love, what wonders of mercy, what prodigies of power meet in the cross of Jesus! -all illustrating the infinite riches of God's grace, the exceeding greatness of His pardoning mercy to sinners. In attempting, in the process of our discussion, to unfold the forgiveness of sin, we lead the reader at once to the place where that forgiveness was procured, where it is spoken and experienced. There is no forgiveness of sin but what was procured by, and there is none but what is found at, the cross of Jesus. It is a remarkable fact, that the only Divine prerogative exercised by Christ upon the cross- the only blessing of grace entwined with His dying accents- was the forgiveness of sin. "Then said Jesus, Father, *forgive* them." Never did this Divine prerogative appear so illustrious; never did its exercise appear so gracious, never did its objects appear so unworthy, as now! May the Divine Spirit aid and hallow our meditation on a theme so momentous and entrancing- *the forgiveness of sin found beneath the cross of Jesus*. Let us take the present instance as illustrating the pardon of all who repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The points which suggest themselves for our study are- the clients, the Advocate, the prayer, and the response.

THE CLIENTS.

On whose behalf was this prayer of the dying Savior addressed? Who were the individuals in whose interest He was breathing, in the midst of His unknown agonies, His indescribable tortures, oblivious of Himself, this petition to God? Around that cross there clustered a class of men, types of our own common humanity, and specimens of our fallen nature. In the first place, we remark, they were sinners. In that crowd of malignant foes surging beneath the cross there was not found one righteous, godly man. They

were sinners. "What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understand, there is none that seeks after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes." Romans 3:9-18 Awful portrait!

But here is our consolation and hope. Sinners though we are, it does not exclude us from the salvation which is in Christ, because *it is for sinners*. Our moral wretchedness does not place us outside the pale of mercy, since mercy is for the *miserable*. It does not put us beyond the reach of Divine grace, since grace is for those who are bankrupt of all righteousness. If you will but prove to me, my reader, that you are a sinner, (and the proof is easy,) with some spiritual sight and sense and consciousness of the fact, then I will prove that you are among the number for whom Christ prayed. Convince us that you are of sinners the chief, then we will show that you are within the range of the Savior's grace. What Cain-mark is there upon your brow which excludes you from the free pardon of your sins procured by the precious blood of Christ? Who dare to say that you were not included in the blessed number on whose behalf Christ was now, amid His unknown agonies, breathing this prayer to heaven? Only be divinely convinced that you are a *sinner*, and *not a righteous person*; that you feel yourself to be guilty and undeserving, and then we will point you to One through whom alone you can be saved- saved now, saved freely, and saved forever.

Not only were they sinners by nature, but there was a peculiar stigma, a deep turpitude of guilt attaching to their character and their crime. They were sworn foes of Christ, openly, avowedly, and to the death. And such, too, are we! Not born again of the Spirit, not called by the sovereign grace of God, whatever may be our outward morality, our form of Christian worship, our punctilious attendance upon ordinances, we are sinners; we have not passed from death unto life, have not been renewed in the spirit of our mind, and must be reckoned among the rejectors of the Lord Jesus, and classed with those who crucified the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

They were not only the sworn foes of Christ, but a deeper dye attached to each- they were the veritable crucifiers of the Lord of life and glory. In other words, *they were Christ's murderers*. Their hands entwined the crown of thorns, and placed it on His brow; *their hands plunged the nails through His sacred body*; and now, gory with His blood, they mocked His dying agonies on the cross. Are we by nature less guilty than they? Not one whit! So long as we persist in a life of sin, we virtually indorse the crimes of these slayers of the Lord, and practically

arrange ourselves among His very murderers. With what force and solemnity is this fact brought home to the child of God when grace renews his heart! Who then appears to his view the true, the real murderer of Jesus? Himself, perchance, the chief! Seeing his sins all laid upon Jesus, tracing his pardon to the atoning death of the Savior, the fact comes home to him with overpowering solemnity, *"My sins murdered the Lord of life and glory! It was I who virtually entwined the thorn-crown, who drove the nail, and who pointed the spear!"*

"'Twas you, my sins, my cruel sins-
His chief tormentors were;
Each of my crimes became a nail,
And unbelief the spear.

"'Twas you that drew that vengeance down
Upon His guiltless head
Break, break my heart, O burst my eyes,
And let my sorrows bleed.

"Strike, mighty Grace, my flinty soul,
Until melting waters flow,
And deep repentance drown my eyes
In undissembled woe!

Such were the clients on whose behalf the dying Savior now prayed. They needed forgiveness. And so do we- oh, how deeply! We are sinners, and as such imperatively need Divine forgiveness. We have precious, deathless interests at stake. We appear in the court of Divine justice indicted with the crime of condemning to death the Son of God. By our impenitence and unbelief, by our hatred and rejection of the Son of God, by our perverted course of sin and rebellion, we justify the men who originally and literally imbued their hands in His precious blood. We ask, is there a being in the universe that stands more in need of the forgiveness of sin than you? And unless your sins are pardoned, your crimes cancelled by the blood His murderers shed, you will stand before His bar side by side with those whose cry rent the air, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Ah, perhaps, many who then washed in the fountain their own hands opened, will witness against you in that day!

Consider THE PLEADING ADVOCATE. And who is now pleading for them with His Father? *It was the suffering Savior, the dying Christ- it was the very Being whose sacred body they were tormenting*, the very individual in whose face they were casting their cruel taunts- "If you be the Son of God save yourself." "Come down from the cross, and we will believe you." "He saved others, himself he cannot save."

A marvellous and precious page in our Lord's official relation to His people unfolds to the eye here- the relation He sustains to them as the ADVOCATE. "If

any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." He had, previously to ascending that cross, poured out His heart in a sublime intercessory prayer on behalf of His one and entire Church. His present appearance as an Advocate portrays Him in a new and novel light- praying on behalf of sinners, those sinners His crucifiers. Who, with this striking and impressive fact before him, dares assert that we have no spiritual concern with the unconverted? that it is impious to regard them as interested in the Savior's death? that they are to have no interest in our sacred sympathies and efforts, in our warnings, entreaties, and prayers?

The solemn scene of Calvary goes to disprove conclusions so directly opposed to the entire genius of the gospel. Christ loved sinners, warned sinners, prayed for sinners, died for sinners. And he who wraps himself in his theological creed and religious selfishness, and affects to look with cold indifference upon the conversion of souls, treads a path in which he will follow not a single footprint of the Savior! Oh to have more of the sympathy and compassion of Him who rained tears of lamentation over Jerusalem!

Two or three points, illustrating the nature of Christ's advocacy, invite our attention. The first is, His filial relation to God. "Father," said the dying Savior. Mark the confidence which, in that awful hour, existed between the Son of God and the Father. Though the Father was veiling the light of His countenance, was withholding the manifestations of His love, abandoning Him to the power of His enemies, who, like dogs of war, were let loose upon His 'darling' one, yet Jesus never lost sight of the truth that God was still His Father. Impressive and precious the lesson taught us here. Forget not, chastened and afflicted child of God, when the cup of trembling is in your hand, and you fear to press it to your lip; when, visited with afflictive dispensations, He veils the light of His countenance, and leaves you to tread alone and dreary path, that He is your Father still! And that, *be the cloud never so dark, the chastening never so severe, it is your privilege to cleave to Him as your Father, and to nestle your weary, sorrow-stricken soul in the parental bosom of that loving, gracious God.*

Then, observe the bar at which Christ the Advocate pleaded. Jesus was now affixed to the cross. From amid the darkest shadows of His closing life, impaled upon the accursed tree, stretched upon the rack in inconceivable agonies, dying the painful, lingering death of crucifixion, He yet sent up His prayer to God for the forgiveness of His enemies. *The altar at which He stood, the bar from which He pleaded, was the cross all streaming with His blood!* It was the spot most appropriate for such an Advocate pleading for such clients. He could not have made advocacy at any other bar than the bar of Calvary. He could not have stood in any other court than that of Divine justice. What a truth beams forth from this! Beloved, it was the cross that laid the basis of our Lord's advocacy. The precious mercies He implores for you are all asked and secured on the basis of His expiatory sacrifice, on the ground of His sufferings and death for sinners. This it is which invests with such authority, and imparts such power, tenderness,

and efficacy to His intercession- the glory brought to the moral government of God by His sacrificial death. "Father, I will that those whom you have given me may have their crimes effaced, their sins pardoned, their souls saved. That those for whom I have poured out my atoning blood, may behold my glory." Oh, is it within the range of possibility that such an Advocate, sending up to heaven such a prayer, and from such a bar, can fail in securing the blessings He asks? Never! This is just the plea of our Advocate in glory. The ground of His present intercession in heaven, is the perfection of His atoning work on earth. "By His own blood He entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

No longer pleading at the bar of His blood- impurpled cross on earth, He pleads before the golden throne in heaven- but the hands He uplifts are scarred, and the argument He employs is the death to which those scars testify. The ground of His intercession for us before the throne is the sacrifice He offered for us upon the cross when He offered up Himself.

There is another view of the Advocate inexpressibly touching. We refer to the fact of His love, the deep love He had for His clients. It is true they were enemies, but He loved them; they were sinners, yet He loved them; they were murderers, still He loved them notwithstanding all. From where that prayer, do you think, my reader? From what fathomless depth in the heart of Jesus did that petition rise? What was the power that impelled it heavenward? What were the wings that bore it to God? Oh, it was love, and nothing but love! He loved them, and the expression and the embodiment of His love was the prayer, "Father, forgive them!" *Beloved, what a marvellous, unparalleled love is the love of our Jesus!* The scene around that cross was such that we do not wonder that no artist's pencil has ever succeeded in its delineation. It would seem as if our fallen humanity had concentrated its deepest, darkest elements of depravity upon that hallowed spot. But there was that which flowed over it all. Oh, it was the love of Christ! that love which has heights and depths, lengths and breadths, which surpass all measurement. His love seemed to veil the dark crime of His crucifiers. Forgetting His insufferable agonies of body, the more insufferable agonies of His soul, in the ineffable depths of His love He prays, "Father, *forgive* them, for they know not what they do." Believer in Jesus, as you stand before this marvellous spectacle, relinquish all your doubts and misgivings as to the reality and vastness of Christ's love to you. Descend into this infinite sea, and exclaim, "Oh the depths of that love that floods over all my transgressions, drowning all my sins, so that not one shall ever be found!" If such is the love of Christ to His enemies, what must His love be to His friends! Love is bearing you in its heart in heaven- love is interceding for you in glory- love asks that your faith may not fail, that your enemies may not triumph, that all the blessings of the upper and the nether springs may be yours-love pleads the causes of your soul.

But what was THE BLESSING for which Christ pleaded? It was FORGIVENESS. "Father, *forgive*." And what a blessing! It is the highest exercise of the Divine

prerogative, and the richest gift of Divine grace- the forgiveness of sin! Such is the state of all the Lord's people. According to the tenor of the New Covenant- the covenant of grace- God says, "I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and *their iniquities will I remember no more.*" Oh, what an oblivion of sin is this- the Divine forgetfulness! What! are His people's sins so fully pardoned, so entirely forgiven, so completely annihilated, as to pass forever from the Divine remembrance? Will He legally remember them no more? So says God, and so we believe. Seek earnestly the Holy Spirit's, witness to this in your conscience. Believe it without a single reservation. If God laid your sins upon Christ, then they are all taken off from you, charged to Him, punished and condemned in His person. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Not sin- for God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us all trespasses. Oh, walk in the sense of pardon; it will dissolve your heart in penitence, fill you with joy, and yet with shame, self-abhorrence, and sin-hatred, when you know that God is pacified toward you for all that you have done. When is the heart of the poor criminal the most deeply touched and dissolved? Is it when he stands beneath the awful beam? Oh, no! it is when he reads his pardon and acquittal! Then it is he weeps! Seek a like emotion, springing from a like cause. Get a sense of pardoned sin, and you will walk softly with God.

*To whom was the appeal of Christ on behalf of these sinners made? To the sin-forgiving God- God, who had declared Himself "ready to pardon," who had revealed Himself as one with whom there was forgiveness; a God, who had from eternity provided a channel for the down-flow of His love through a Savior; who, uniting the Divine with the human. Could by one offering- the offering of Himself- render it righteous in God, and in view of His intelligent universe, to exercise the highest Divine prerogative towards the guiltiest of the human race. Oh, we are but little aware how the pardoning grace of God pants to gush forth towards every humble, contrite, guilt-confessing soul! What in the human breast is the sweetest sentiment- revenge or forgiveness? You do not hesitate. Transfer the thought to God. Forgiveness with Him is so delightful a feeling- a sentiment so consonant with His loving, gracious, beneficent nature- we are told, that while judgment is His strange work, "He delights in mercy." Since, then, the full equivalent which Christ has made to the claims of His moral government renders it honorable and glorious in God to pardon sin, we are fully prepared to receive the next illustration of the Divine forgiveness which this marvellous prayer of Christ upon the cross presents- namely, That *the forgiveness of God is for the greatest crimes*, extending to the chief of sinners. If, as we have observed, all the elements of moral evil were concentrated around the cross, it would seem as if God so permitted it that He might more impressively illustrate the exceeding riches of His grace- that, "where sin abounded, grace should much more abound."*

Penitent soul! behold the encouragement you have that, though your sins are never so enormous or aggravated, you may bring them to the cross, throw down

the burden at its feet, look by faith to the Crucified, wash in the blood that flowed from His pierced side, and taste the sweetness of God's forgiving love. "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord, Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Standing beneath Christ's cross, and in its light reading this Divine declaration- will you- can you hesitate to believe that, though the vilest of the vile, there yet is *forgiveness* with God for you, yes, even for you?

We now pass on to consider THE DIVINE ANSWER to the Savior's prayer. This brings us to the memorable day of Pentecost. Upon that great day of the Jewish festival the heavens were opened, and the Spirit descended "like a mighty rushing wind," and beneath His Divine influence three thousand souls were convinced of sin, believed in Jesus, and were saved. Among these were the murderers of the Lord. Listen to the words of Peter: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And what did they do? They repented, they believed, they washed in the blood their own hands had shed, they accepted Christ, and they were saved. "And the same day there were added unto them the about three thousand souls." Thus was the Savior's prayer answered- "Father *forgive* them."

That prayer has been answered ever since, is being answered now, and will continue to be answered until the last elect child of mercy has been gathered to Him who breathed it, and who now beholds from the throne with infinite satisfaction its accomplishment. Penitent soul! that prayer flings from the cross its arms of love around you. It embraces you in its ever living, ever prevalent intercession. In view of all your past and present sins- sins unmentionable and immeasurable- sins aggravated and exceeding- the Savior of sinners prays, "Father, forgive!" The prayer that rose from the summit of Calvary fills the courts of heaven- and you, a poor, penitent, mourning soul, are included in its earnest, touching, successful petition. Never had the Holy Spirit produced this conviction of sin, wrought this godly sorrow in your heart, were not your name upon the heart of Jesus when He sent up that marvellous prayer from the cross. Oh, what encouragement this to look above the Alpine heights of your transgressions, piercing the very skies, to that yet higher mount bathed in the radiance of forgiving love, where your glorious Advocate with the Father asks and obtains the full and free forgiveness of all your transgressions.

This prayer of Jesus meets the case of all conscious, penitent, backsliding disciples. On the strength of this plea of Christ, return to the Lord, taking with you words of confession and feelings of penitence, and say, "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." *The foot of the cross is the wanderer's place of return.* There can be no real retracing our steps, no true restoration of pardon

and peace and hope, that the bones we have broken may rejoice, until we find ourselves there. Then will our wanderings be arrested, our backslidings be healed. Then will we hear the words- oh, what music floats from the cross of Jesus!- "I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely: for My anger is turned away from him."

And what shall be the conclusion of the whole matter? Once more we repeat, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Beneath the cross the pardon of sin is found. Come to it, you sin-burdened; approach it, you guilt-distressed; return to it, you backsliding penitents! Nothing but forgiveness- full and free and changeless- will you find at the foot of the Savior's cross. Weep there, mourn there, confess there- there lay down your sins, renounce and forsake them forever, and you shall hear the words of peace, "Your sins are FORGIVEN you, go and sin no more!"

"Father, I bring this worthless child to You,
To claim Your pardon once; yet once again
Receive him at my hands- for he is Mine.
He is a worthless child; he owns his guilt.
Look not on him- he cannot bear Your glance.
Look on Me; his vileness I will hide.
He pleads not for himself- he dares not plead
His cause is Mine- I am his Advocate.
By each pure drop of blood I shed for him,
By all the sorrows engraved on My soul,
By every wound I bear, I claim it due.
Father Divine! I cannot have him lost,
He is a worthless soul, but he is Mine.
Sin has destroyed him: sin has died in Me
Death has pursued him; I have conquered death
Satan has bound him; Satan is my slave.
My Father! hear him now- not him, but Me.
I would not have him lost for all the worlds
You for Your glory have ordained and made,
Because he is a poor and contrite child,
And all his every hope on Me reclines.
I know My children, and I know him Mine.
By all the tears he weeps upon My bosom,
By his full heart that beats against Mine
I know him by his sighings and his prayers,
By his deep trusting love which clings to Me.
I could not bear to see him cast away,
Weak as he is, the weakest of My flock
The one that grieves Me most, that loves Me least
I measure not My love by his returns;
And though the stripes I send to speed him home

Drive him, upon the instant, from My breast,
Still he is Mine. I drew him from the world.
He has no right, no home but in My love.
Though earth and hell against his soul conspire,
I shield him- keep him- save him- we are one."

"O sinner! what an Advocate have you!
Methinks I see Him lead the culprit in,
Poor, sorrowing, shamed, all tremulous with fear,
Prostrate behind his Lord, weak, self-condemned.
Clad with his Savior's spotless Righteousness,
Himself to hide, and hear the Father's words!
My Son! his cause is Yours, and Yours is Mine
Take up Your poor lost one- HE IS FORGIVEN."

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