

The Foot of the Cross

The Conviction of Truth Beneath the Cross

By Octavius Winslow

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Truly he was the Son of God!" Matthew 27:54

Among the great blessings found beneath the cross of Christ, to which the attention of the reader has been directed, we know of none exceeding in its importance *the conviction of Divine truth which is brought to the mind of the humble, believing student of the Bible*. The cross, as we have reminded you, is the central fact of God's moral universe. All Divine *truth* meets in Christ's cross. All *glory* beams from Christ's cross. All *spiritual blessings* distill from Christ's cross. It is at its feet that the studious, earnest mind receives the most luminous, comprehensive, and glorious revelations and views of the Divine Being; and from thence he draws the sweetest and richest blessings to his soul.

The subject of our present meditation is- the Divine instruction, the perception and conviction of truth, received by the humble, spiritual disciple who carries his spiritual ignorance, perplexities, and doubts to the foot of Christ's cross, for solution. The words we have quoted will at once suggest to the mind this train of thought. While all around the cross were reviling the Savior, indulging their scepticism and their hate, here was a lonely group, bending with pensive sadness at its foot; and, as the strange phenomena were transpiring- the earth trembling, the sun darkening, the rocks rending, and the graves opening- there darted the conviction of truth into the mind of the wondering centurion; and, overwhelmed by its convincing and irresistible force, the exclamation bursts from his astonished soul, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

The grand error of many earnest inquirers is, they mistake the place, the position, and the spirit in which Divine truth is really learned. They will go in quest of truth to every quarter but the legitimate one. They will be the followers of every teacher but the Divine One. They will be the earnest students of every book, but the Book of God. They see not that the true skill of a spiritual learner is to unlearn; that *the true posture of a Christian disciple is with his mouth in the dust before God*; that, while natural theology will unveil many a glorious attribute of Jehovah, while the physical world will present many a grand view of the Divine power and goodness, yet that moral truth, spiritual, gospel, soul-saving truth, can

only be found in the cross, and can only be truly, experimentally learned in the believing, humble spirit of a true disciple, sitting where the devout centurion sat; with him gazing upon the spectacle that filled his mind with light, his soul with astonishment, when, under the conviction of truth, he exclaimed, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Let us proceed to quote some of those great, vital truths of Revelation which are only properly learned at the foot of Christ's cross.

I begin with the first revealed truth, the Being of God. Not that other evidences of this truth are lacking. The *creation* is one vast volume of evidence to the being of God. We hesitate not to aver that no man shall stand acquitted at the bar of God of the crime of having denied His existence from a lack of evidence. He may never have heard of a God, or of His revelation to man; upon his ear may never have chimed the glad tidings of the gospel; he may never have heard of the cross of Calvary, with all its wonders; yet, we hesitate not to affirm that the granite rocks, the cloud-capped mountains, the flowery valley, the starry heavens, the burning sun, and the natural intuitiveness of the human soul, constitute one vast library of evidence, all testifying to the being of a God; and that man, chargeable with the awful crime of atheism, who dares to deny His existence, with such demonstrative and overwhelming evidences of His eternal power and Godhead, will be without excuse. But *where do we find such demonstrations of the being of a God as are exhibited on the cross of Calvary?* Where has God revealed Himself as here? Where has He demonstrated the solemn fact of His being, of His Divine perfection, as He has done on that accursed tree to which His own hand bound His beloved Son, in order that He might not only harmonize in redemption His infinite perfections, but demonstrate that those perfections were the perfections of an eternal, self-existent, and righteous Being? Study, then, devoutly, believingly the cross, and be no longer an atheist!

The character of God is exhibited, and learned only by the spiritual and believing student, at the cross of Christ. There the Divine character, or, in other words, there God is exhibited in His completeness, His perfect symmetry. We learn something of God's character in other departments of His magnificent and extensive operations. We trace a penciling of God's goodness here, we behold a demonstration of His power there, a magnificent illustration of His wisdom yonder; and thus, as we traverse the circuit of the world, we gather something of what God's character is in these partial developments and unfoldings. But we need the full, complete, focal portrait and representation of His character. Where shall we find it? Where but in the cross of Christ? There, my reader, God stands before you complete-not an attribute of His nature, not a perfection of His being, not a trait of His character but is embodied, expressed, and unveiled; and the man who bends before that cross as a humble, believing student; one spiritual, believing glance will discover more of God's character in its glory, perfection, and harmony, than did he absorb the entire volume of creation's evidence.

The grand truth concerning God's relation to us as a reconciled God and Father, is nowhere learned but in the cross of Christ. Nowhere can we find anything of what the heart of God is, what His pardoning mercy to us is, what His thoughts of peace to us are as sinners, but as we learn it all in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We may travel the circuit of creation, and behold His marvellous and glorious works and goodness, which, as with a lavish hand, He has scattered all around, but we find no relief to the anxious yearnings of our bosom oppressed with a sense of sin. We ask the sun- How may I obtain light to this my spiritually darkened understanding? and not a beam floating from that glorious orb responds! We ask the rocks- How may my heart, cold and insensible as marble, dissolve into penitence and love? and they are silent! We ask the winds- How may the life-giving breath enter my heart, and I become a living soul, living henceforth to, God? and not a zephyr answers! We ask the mountain stream and the ocean's waves- How may my sins be washed away, and not the shadow of a stain remain? and all are silent as the sea of death! No oracle in nature meets the momentous inquiry, "What must I do to be saved? " Oppressed with guilt, crushed beneath a load of sin, conscience lashing us as with scorpion-sting, hell staring us in the face, we wend our mournful footsteps to Calvary, and stand beneath the cross of the incarnate God. We gaze upon His wounds, look at His flowing blood, hide within His pierced side, and embracing in faith the doctrine of the cross- Christ dying for the ungodly, suffering the Just for the unjust- in a moment the great question is answered, the burden of guilt is removed, and we learn how God in the suffering Son of His love can be pacified towards us. There we read God's love, and in embracing the crucified Savior, we feel we are embraced in the arms of our reconciled Father. Oh, you who are wandering in quest of an answer to the anxious inquiry, "How may I know that God is reconciled to me, the vilest rebel that ever trod the earth? How may I know that my innumerable sins are pardoned, that my soul is saved, that God regards me propitiously, and looks upon me in forgiving mercy?" *Go to Calvary, travel to the cross, gaze in faith upon that wonderful spectacle-* the spectacle of Christ suffering and dying, the Holy for the unholy, that He might bring you to God, and your questions shall be answered in the peace and joy of assured forgiveness.

Another doctrine especially learned beneath the cross of Christ is the doctrine of His Essential Deity. We believe that nowhere is there such a demonstration of the Deity of the Son of God, as is found in the cross. Our Lord never appeared more really man than when in indescribable soul-agony, and in unparalleled bodily suffering, He traveled through those lingering hours of pain on that accursed tree. And yet, never did the *deity* of Christ appear more evident than when the sun of His humanity was setting in darkness and in blood; never were there such demonstrations of His Godhead, such seals to the doctrine of His divinity, as when, suspended upon that cross, He bowed His head and died. If, my reader, there lurks within your breast the slightest suspicion of His Godhead, and you desire your faith in this cardinal doctrine of salvation confirmed, fall at the foot of the cross, sit and gaze upon that wondrous scene, mark those

astounding prodigies of nature which transpired at the moment that Christ expired! and we ask, if your mind is sensible to conviction, and you are really anxious to know the truth as it is in Jesus, whether the exclamation of your soul will not be an echo of the convinced centurion, "Truly this is the Son of God!"

Observe, again, it is only in the cross of Christ that the essential, saving doctrine of our faith- the atonement is seen, learned, and received. A man may be a student of the most able treatise ever penned by human hand on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and yet close the book with a very vague, imperfect conception of the marvellous truth, or with a very faint conviction of its reality. But let him travel to the cross, become a lowly student there, a humble, earnest, believing inquirer after truth, and he shall not leave that awful spot without an overwhelming conviction of the fact, that those sufferings were expiatory, that that death was sacrificial, and that the mystery of the whole scene can only be explained, the problem of the Sinless suffering as the sinful only solved, by the doctrine of an expiatory offering; that all those mental and bodily sufferings were in consequence of His bearing our sin and curse; that His death, thus voluntarily and freely offered, was a satisfaction to the justice of Jehovah, and designed to unite and harmonize all the moral attributes of God in the salvation of man. Go my reader, in faith and lowliness to the cross, study its Victim, dwell upon its unparalleled scenes, and you will rise with the firm conviction that Christ died, not as a hero, nor as a philosopher, nor as an example of virtue and fortitude, but to redeem and save lost and ruined man.

Nowhere, except here, can the doctrine of the atonement be learned; nowhere but beneath the cross can it be received into the believing heart; nowhere but upon Calvary can these marvellous predictions of prophecy be understood- "He was wounded [^{'tormented,' marg.]} for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed." "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquities of us all." "Christ also has loved us, and has given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor." Approach, then, in faith the foot of the cross; in its light read, by its spectacle interpret, those marvellous passages, and see if your conviction of the great truth will not be as deep and devout as that of the centurion, "Truly, Christ died for the ungodly!" Thus accept the atonement, thus believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved!

And have we a stronger proof and illustration of the doctrine of the Trinity than is found beneath the cross of Calvary? The moment an inquiring mind after that truth is led to receive the doctrine of the cross in simple faith, which is, the doctrine of the Atonement made on our behalf by the death of Christ, it finds no difficulty in accepting the doctrine of three distinct People in the one Godhead. No individual can fully understand the doctrine of the Trinity who rejects Christ's Atonement. The light that beams from thence invests with radiance every other revealed truth. Where the light of the cross is not, the light of reason is as Egyptian darkness. Nature is wrapped in midnight gloom, unenlightened by one

ray that flows from the cross of Calvary. But let an inquirer for truth stand at this focal point, let him place himself beneath the beams of the Divine glory concentrated in the crucified Savior, and he will find no difficulty in embracing every doctrine of God's revealed Word. Here is the grand mistake men make, in not commencing their study of God's Word, their inquiries after the truths of revelation, at the cross of Jesus. Do you think that the sceptics of the day would be found, in this advanced age of Biblical research, questioning the truth of the Bible, ignoring the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, and, with effete weapons borrowed from the dusty arsenals of error, whose edge had long since been turned, attacking the integrity of the Pentateuch, involving in its fall the destruction of the entire fabric of truth, had they made the cross of Christ the starting point of their investigations, the foundation of their inquiries? Alas! men, for the most part, commence at the farthest circumference of truth, and endeavor to work their way to the center; thus reversing God's order, which is to commence at the center and so reach the circumference. Now, with regard to the profoundly mysterious doctrine of a Triune God, we admit that the mode of the divine existence transcends the power of human reason to explain; and yet, no revealed doctrine of the Bible is more consonant with reason than it. And he who will receive the Atonement of the cross as a little child, as a humble disciple at the feet of Jesus, shall know of this doctrine whether it be of God, or whether we speak it of ourselves. In the light streaming from Calvary he will read and understand these remarkable words, "For through Him [Christ crucified] we both [Jew and Gentile] have access, by one Spirit, unto the Father." Could the doctrine of the three Divine People, in their essential unity and official relations, be more luminous?

The way of salvation is only clearly seen in the light of the cross. All the mystery and complexity and crudeness which, in the view of many, gathers around the way by which a sinner is saved, is the result of studying redemption from every stand-point but the correct one- the cross of Jesus. If an individual looks at salvation through his favorite creed, or church, or early education, it will, in all probability, receive a complexion unfavorable to a simple, lucid, believing apprehension of the way by which God saves the sinner. But let him approach the cross as a sinner, as a learner, as a penitent believer, divesting himself of all ecclesiastical, traditional, and educational trammels and prejudices, and receive the simple yet sublime truth, "In due time, when we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly," and he is saved! Salvation can be conveyed by no church or minister; its nature must be studied through no ecclesiastical or priestly medium. Passing by every other object, we must pause not in our search for the priceless, precious treasure until we confront the naked cross, and stand in the immediate presence of the crucified Nazarene. The spectacle may be appalling, the posture humiliating; nevertheless, while all self-righteousness, all human merit, all pride of intellect, all hatred and opposition to the truth pales and expires in the pure effulgence of the cross. On the other hand, full salvation is found- the *blood* that effaces the guilt of sin, the *righteousness* that justifies the person of the sinner, the *peace* that tranquillizes the troubled conscience, the *hope* that

expels the demon of despair, the *heaven* that supplants our hell- in a believing reception of the doctrine of Christ crucified, in the humble position of the soul studying at the foot of Christ's cross. Come, then, you perplexed searchers for truth- come, you anxious inquirers after salvation- come, you weary and heavy laden- come, you sin and sorrow-stricken, come, you self-destroyed and bankrupt- come, you who have resisted evidence and stifled conviction, who have effaced impressions and quenched hopes, approach the cross of Jesus, believe, and be saved!

We may add, and it is a solemn conclusion, that at the cross of Christ the justice of God, in the final condemnation of the impenitent, is fully exhibited. Hell itself, *with all its untold and inconceivable woe, exhibits no such expression of God's holiness, justice, and power as confront us in the sufferings and death of the Son of God!* Finding the sins of the Church charged to Christ, their Surety, Divine justice drew its sword and slew Him. Bearing the curse of His people, the holiness of God extracted from Him the death-penalty they had incurred. What is the true, the solemn, the awful conclusion? It is this- If the pure, the sinless, the innocent Son of God endured the Divine wrath due for His people's sins, what must be the certain and the righteous doom of those who die in their sins, unsheltered by the Atonement of the cross from the wrath that is to come? Sin found charged to the account of the Savior was the cause of His death. Sin found upon and charged to the account of the sinner, when his soul goes hence, will expose him to just and eternal punishment. From this logical but appalling inference there is no avenue of escape. If your sins are pardoned by Christ, then you are saved; but if you die impenitent and unbelieving, then must you endure the inevitable and equitable condemnation of those sins. Despising a Savior so divine, scorning a sacrifice so complete, and neglecting a salvation so great, how shall you, how can you, escape? "There remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. O man! O woman! I put it to your conscience, I appeal to your judgment, if God will not be righteous, His throne guiltless, His justice, holiness, and truth awfully severe, yet eternally glorified, in condemning to endless woe the soul who wilfully rejects Jesus Christ, His beloved Son? Spurn and thrust from you the *life-boat* which a God of love has launched upon the dark, surging waters of the curse, for the rescue and salvation of poor lost sinners buffeting amid its billows, and you sink into the yawning gulf of the bottomless pit, the *author and the architect of your own just and everlasting destruction*- a moral suicide! He who said, "He that believes shall be *saved*," also said, "And he that believes not shall be *damned*."

We gather from the subject of this chapter, HOW IRRESISTIBLY FORCIBLE AND CONVINCING IS DIVINE TRUTH! Confronted by Essential Truth, around whom were accumulating the witnesses of His Divinity- creation in sympathy with the death of her Creator- the centurion, before perhaps a sceptic and a scorner, now exclaims, "TRULY this was the Son of God!" We hesitate not to affirm that an individual, be his ignorance, scepticism, and prejudice what it may, who will

take his lowly place at the cross, study the gospel in its light, shall find no difficulty in accepting all its essential, precious, and sublime truths. In what way?

In the first place, there will be the reconciliation of his mind to all that is mysterious in Divine truth. He will not cavil at a doctrine, or reject a truth, or disbelieve a fact, because it transcends the grasp of his intellect. He will not ask for mathematical demonstration in proof of moral truth, but, accepting the greater mystery of godliness- "God manifest in the flesh"- he accepts all other mysteries in it- the faith that embraces the Savior equally embracing the salvation. Thus, when the humble and believing heart receives Christ Jesus the Lord, it receives the whole truth, because it receives Him who is essentially and emphatically "*the truth*;" and then, all the scepticism, perplexity, and opposition which previously enshrouded the mind in its investigation of revealed truth disappears as the gray mists of the morning which wreath the mountain's brow dissolve into sunshine before the ascending orb of day. "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Again, receiving into your heart Christ crucified, there will be a moral molding of the life to the gospel of Jesus. The conviction produced by Divine truth is not simply intellectual, it also emotional; while it enlightens the judgement. It penetrates and sanctifies the heart. It was one of our Lord's petitions in His sublime intercessory prayer, "Sanctify them through the truth." The "truth which is after godliness," thus insinuating itself into the heart, becomes an element of holiness; and thus those who receive Christ crucified are emphatically numbered among "the pure in heart, who shall see God."

The intensifying of our love to God will follow. One of the effects of a spiritual conviction and a believing reception of the truth as it is in Jesus is *love*. No embers will enkindle upon the altar of the human heart such a fire and flame of divine love as those which we take from off the altar of the cross. Do you want, my reader, a "burning heart?" Take your heart, all dark and icy as it is, and bring it in contact with the cross of Calvary, and while you are musing upon its stupendous spectacle of love, the fire will burn and your lips will praise. Our love to God and to Christ and to the saints will be proportioned to our walks in Gethsemane and our visits to Calvary. "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God!"

Lastly, there will be the happiness and comfort of a full assurance. There is no assurance like that which is found in close proximity to the cross of Jesus. Oh, with what of earthly good would not many a child of God part to be fully persuaded of a personal interest in Christ! But why should there be a moment's doubt? Approach the cross, look in simple faith to Christ, the Crucified, accept Jesus as the Savior, believe in Him as a sinner, learn of Him as a disciple, follow and glorify Him as a saint, and the conviction will be as true, and the joy will be as thrilling, and the hope will be as bright, and the exclamation will be as loud as the centurion's. "Truly, Lord, I am your servant, your child, your disciple! bought

with blood! and henceforth, whether I live, I live unto the Lord; and whether I die, I die unto the Lord; whether I live or die, I am the Lord's!"

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