

The Foot of the Cross

The Cross of Christ the Christian's Weapon

By Octavius Winslow

"They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." Rev. 12:11

What an impressive illustration is presented in these words of another equally inspired and instructive declaration of the Bible- "God has chosen the *foolish* things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the *weak* things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and *base* things of the world, and things which are *despised*, has God chosen." That 'foolish thing,' that 'weak thing,' that 'base thing,' that 'despised thing,' *in the world's estimation*, which God has chosen as the instrument of saving His elect Church, of conquering the enmity against Him in of the human heart, of extending His kingdom in the earth, and of ultimately subjugating this revolted empire to His supremacy is *the cross of Christ*. This weak, this rude, this ignominious and despised instrument- the preaching of Christ on the cross- is destined to overthrow sin's empire in the soul, wrench the scepter from the grasp of the god of this world, overturn all false religions, and subjugate the empire of the world to Christ's glorious reign.

But we must limit our discussion of this entrancing theme to the case of the *individual believer*. The words, which primarily refer to the "noble army of martyrs," involve a principle which will apply with equal force to any age of Christianity, and every form of spiritual opposition to which the Church of God collectively and individually may be exposed.

The Christian life is a moral conflict, the Christian a spiritual combatant. To no single fact did our Lord give greater prominence than this "I came not to send *peace* on earth, but a *sword*;" indicating thereby that the heavenly and spiritual religion He descended to introduce, while it was designed to bless and save the world, was essentially antagonistic to its principles and its spirit; and that all who professed His 'unearthly religion' would awaken hostility from every quarter, and array against themselves the most sacred and endeared relations of life, so that "a man's foes should be those of his own house."

But the great truth before us is, THE WEAPON OF OUR HOLY WAR. It is not of man's forging, of earth's temper, of carnal might- it is of God's providing, heavenly and divine; and although in the eyes of men simple and lowly, it is all-mighty, all-conquering, and irresistible- the weapon of Christ's cross. "*They*

overcame him by the blood of the Lamb." The subject is one of the profoundest interest, inconceivably important and precious. *The weapon that is to conquer the world for Christ, is to conquer the world of evil in our hearts;* and, wielded by the arm of faith, is to vanquish and overcome all the spiritual opposition by which our path to heaven is intercepted. *We are to overcome, as the martyrs overcame, by the blood of the Lamb.* Heavenly and invincible is this weapon. No foe can cope with it, no opposition resist it, no confederacy overcome it. The blood of Jesus, as an offensive and defensive weapon, is all-powerful and irresistible in our holy war, feeble though the arm may be that wields it.

But it is proper that we should in the outset briefly notice a few of these forms of OPPOSITION, in the experience of the believer, which this invincible weapon especially meets and overcomes. And should I not, my reader, specify the exact form of opposition with which in your personal experience you conflict, permit me yet to remind you that, whatever may be the foe with whom you wage this holy war- within or without- whatever the obstacle to your advance in the divine life, faith, looking to the blood of Jesus, wielding the cross of Christ, drawing its supplies from the resources of Christ, will enroll you among those who overcome by the blood of the Lamb!

In the Christian conflict we are engaged, first, with the forces of error. The Church of God is composed of all who hold and love the truth. Truth is everything to the man of God. With not one iota of God's revealed truth can he part, not one doctrine or command can he regard with indifference or relinquish without a struggle. By these divine and precious truths his soul has been quickened, sanctified, and comforted. Wherever the Church of God meets with any form of spurious Christianity, or with those who deny any one of the essential tenets of our faith, it meets a foe; and, if we are loyal to Christ, if true soldiers of the cross, it behooves us to buckle on the whole armor of God, to take the sword of the Spirit, and act valiantly for the truth, "earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints."

Our second foe is the world. In every age of the Church the world has been one of its most subtle and ensnaring enemies. In a variety of forms it seeks to throw the spell of its fascination around the saints of God by its many disguises, its specious arguments, its lawful engagements, its aims to draw from the simplicity of Christ. No little skill in this holy war is required to explode the sophistry and resist the blandishments of this ungodly world. How many religious professors are conquered by its reasonings, won by its friendships, vanquished by its pleasures, swallowed up by its temptations! Like Demas, they forsake Christ for the love of an ungodly world. And yet the world is the sworn foe of the Church of God. It crucified its Head, and would crucify its members. The more closely His followers follow Him, the more unearthly their religion, the more decidedly and deadly will the world regard itself their foe. We have more to fear from the smiles of the world than its frowns, more from its bewitching charms than its contemptuous sneer, more from its specious promises than its disdainful irony.

The *persecution* of the world has never really injured the spiritual life of any Christian professor, but the *caresses* of the world have slain its thousands.

Then, then is the Christian's great foe- the god of this world. And yet how invisible his form, how noiseless his tread, how subtle his temptations, how unsuspected his approach, how artful and successful his designs! He is "the accuser of the brethren," "the prince of the power of the air," "the god of this world," "the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience." Such are his titles, and if they mean anything, they are significant of much. Such is the foe we daily, hourly confront.

Sin in the world, and sin in the Church, and sin in the individual believer, must be classed among our strongest antagonistic foes. *We can not take a step without coming in contact with sin.* The privacy of our closet is not exempt- sin is still there in our sinful hearts. What a solemn thought it is for the child of God, that the Divine standard of Christian holiness, the Scripture measure of Christian consecration, so far transcends his highest attainments! We are compelled to own that we are but partly renewed. We scarcely deserve the name of saints, so perpetually is sin marring all we do for Christ. Filled with shame, and at times tempted to give up the conflict and yield to the foe, we place our mouth in the dust before God, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

In addition to all this must be quoted the discipline of trial. Trials are, what the word implies, tests of character and Christianity. What a severe conflict when the afflictive providences of our God are seized upon by Satan and sin as an occasion for stirring up the corruptions of the heart, and of rousing the latent rebellion of the will against God. And yet, O Lord our God, by this You teach us! By this painful discipline, by these humiliating circumstances, do You instruct us in the art of warring against sin, to be better soldiers of the cross, more mighty and successful in the holy war. There is no experience like *the endurance of trial.* The man of God best adapted to lead the van of Christ's army, who should take front rank in the conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil, is he who has been instructed by trials, who has endured a great fight of afflictions. *The valiant and successful soldier of the cross is he who has been taught and trained in God's school of sorrow.* The most eminently holy saints have been the most victorious saints; and the most victorious saints in the great fight of faith have ever been the most deeply tried saints. Eminent affliction is essential to eminent holiness, to completeness of Christian character. No believer's Christianity is fully tested until it passes through this crucible. The *activities of religion* bring into play a part only of our religious character; affliction is needful to develop and exercise the *passive graces of the Spirit*- both essential to form the character of the Christian warrior.

But we must now consider THE WEAPON used by Christians in this great and holy conflict. Of all those Christians who laid down their lives for Jesus in the

early Church, none obtained the victory but by THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB! In this holy war, the Christian is ever portrayed as a *victor*, so certain, so sure, so triumphant is the issue. "Overcome!" Mark that word! A most encouraging truth this for you who may now be in the heat of this spiritual conflict! Well might you tremble at the skill and strength and subtlety of your foe, but for this assured truth that, having put on Christ's armor, you are engaged in a conflict, you are prosecuting a war, of the victorious result of which there is no more doubt than that Christ Jesus is your Leader. Often foiled and wounded in the strife, you yet follow victorious legions, led by a triumphant Captain.

It is by the blood of Jesus we overcome error. Religious error is plausible, reasoning, and subtle. It is seldom presented but in connection with some portion of truth; and to eliminate that small portion of truth from the mass of error in which it is embedded, often demands no little art in this holy war. But no form or onslaught of false doctrine can withstand the power of Christ's cross. Our wisdom, when confronted by the many specious and subtle forms of false doctrine, is not so much to argue and reason, to unveil the sophistry and expose the hollowness of the error, as to confront it with the Divine doctrine of the cross. Truth and error can never coalesce. They may be mixed, but they cannot co-mingle. No two opposite elements in chemistry are so irreconcilable. Truth may float upon the surface of error, as oil upon the water, but no act of sacred alchemy can unite them. "Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." See, then, the weapon by which you may dissolve the enchantment and repel the assault of error. Bring every doctrine, principle, and practice which men would foist upon you to the light of the cross and to the test of the Bible. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Seek by the Spirit's teaching to be so rooted and grounded in the doctrines of which the cross of Christ is the center and symbol, as to prove invulnerable to the shafts of error, feathered though they may be by all the charms of human learning and philosophy, poetry and eloquence.

It is by the cross we obtain the victory over sin. The instrument by which sin was condemned, and through whose channel its pardon flows to us, is the only effectual instrument of its crucifixion in us. A believing, experimental apprehension of the death of Christ is death to the ruling, reigning power of sin in the regenerate. The sense of its pardoned guilt, the conviction of its annihilated condemnation, begets in the soul a loathing of its nature, a shrinking from its commission, and arms us with rebellion against its supremacy and power. "There is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared." The language of the Church is: "I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?" That of the apostle is equally significant of this truth: "I am crucified with Christ." Take, then, beloved reader, the existence of indwelling sin in your heart- its easy besetting forms, its ever-wakeful, ever-working power- to the cross of Jesus; and as the Holy Spirit unveils and reveals it to your soul, *seeing Jesus crucified for your sins and by your sins*, that fresh discovery, that renewed sight of the cross of Calvary, will enable you to mortify the deeds of the body, and to present it a holy and a living sacrifice to

God.

The power of atoning blood to *subdue* our iniquities is not less than its efficacy in *pardoning* them. In either case, we can only effectually deal with sin as we deal with Him who was slain for sin. Jesus the crucified is as much our sanctification as He is our redemption. The Spirit's sprinkling of the blood that has pardoned all, cleansed all, cancelled all our sins, intensifies the motive and energizes the soul to repel its attacks, and to rest not from the conflict until the nail has been driven home which *fastens every lust to the cross of Jesus*. Oh, what motive, what power, in the great, the essential work of personal holiness does the cross of Jesus supply! How should we hate sin, battle with sin, resist and overcome it, who have a personal and saving interest in the great and solemn transactions of Calvary! If the spot where the blood of the victim fell was so sacred, if the temple furniture touched by sacrificial blood was so holy, oh, what words can depict the solemn consecration to God of that soul washed in the atoning blood of God's beloved Son! Lord, if he that is washed in Your blood is clean every whit, wash me! not my feet only, but also my hands and my head, that my obedience may be more unreserved, my service more complete, my mind more deeply sanctified- each part of my being purified, sanctified, and dedicated by Your blood.

Faith, wielding the invincible weapon of the cross, skillfully repels and effectually vanquishes the attacks of Satan. The only weapon in the believer's armory which Satan most dreads, is the cross of Christ. He can glibly quote Scripture, and so press into his own deceitful purpose a weapon of divine temper; but the cross of Calvary he dreads. Well does he remember the words, spoken by the Eternal One while yet a measure of the bloom and the fragrance of paradise rested upon the bowers and glens of Eden, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." The great battle of Satan is not so much with the Body as with the Head; not so much with the Church as with the Savior of the Church. Upon Christ all his virulence concentrates, around Him all his opposition gathers. To wound Christ through His members is one of his master strategic arts. But how is the believer to meet and overcome this arch-foe of his soul, this deceiver and accuser of the brethren? Simply and only by the blood of the Lamb. Skillful and mighty to wield the weapons of the cross, no onslaught of the foe, however fierce; no dart taken from his quiver, however flaming; no snare of fowler, however concealed; no gleam of the serpent's eye, however soft and fascinating, shall overcome the weakest saint. The devil hates the cross, fears the cross, is cowed and impotent before the cross of Jesus; in which he beholds the instrument of his past ignominious defeat, and the sign and the pledge of his future and final overthrow. Satan-tempted soul! fly to the foot of the cross. Satan dare not bring a railing accusation against you there. Faith reading its pardon and acquittal, realizing that "there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus," can confront and boldly challenge this subtle, sleepless foe of his soul, "Who are you that accuses and condemns me? My sins are all forgiven, my guilt

all cancelled, my debt all paid by Jesus, my Divine Surety, on that cross which to you is death, but to me is life." Thus, beloved, shall you be numbered among those who overcame by the blood of the Lamb.

And this, too, is the victory that overcomes the world. The world is Satan's seat, his empire, his throne. No marvel, then, that it becomes one of his most powerful, and, alas! too successful instruments of drawing the saints from Jesus. We have already, in this work, indicated some of the forms of worldly temptation by which believers are assailed. It will suffice if, in the present chapter, we simply refer to the weapon by which these temptations are successfully repelled. *The weapon is the cross upon which the world crucified Christ.* This was the spiritual equipment of Paul, this the invincible sword by which he triumphed. "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world." Clad with this armor, wielding this weapon, we too must conquer. Study the world in the light of Christ's cross, and how will it look? Survey it from this elevated and impressive stand-point, and what is its appearance? In no other light can you regard it than as the crucifier of your Lord. It was the world that slew Jesus. He came to save it, and in return for love so marvellous, so self-sacrificing, it maligned and despised Him, rejected and crucified Him, because He testified of it that its works were evil. And still it is His implacable, unslumbering foe- ever seeking to bruise the Head through the members. Oh, think not that the world which entwined the thorn-crown around His brow, will sun you with its smile. Let, then, your dealings with this ungodly world be a constant battle, and the cross of Jesus, wielded in faith and by prayer, your victorious weapon. *The cross must separate you from the pleasures, the religion, and the spirit of the world. It is utterly impossible that you can love the cross and love the world too.* Faith in the cross, and confederacy with the enemies of the cross, are totally irreconcilable. We cannot carry Christ's cross upon our shoulder and the world in our hand at the same time. We cannot be truly crucified by the one and yet live to the other. Either Christ's cross will be to us the death of the world, or the world will be to us the death of Christ's cross. But, oh, what an *honor* is it to be crucified with Christ to this ungodly world! to bear its burning shame, to be subjected to its offence, to endure the pain of its moral crucifixion. As the holy Rutherford beautifully remarks, "The cross of Christ is the sweetest burden that ever I bore; it is such a burden as wings are to a bird, or as sails to a ship, to carry me forward to my desired haven. To be crucified to the world is not so highly accounted by us as it should be. How heavenly a thing it is to be deaf to, and dead to, this world's sweetest music! It is little the world can take from me, and as little can it give me."

The cross of Christ, too, is the only effectual weapon of the Christian ministry. It is a great, a supernatural work, the work of dethroning Satan in the heart, and subjecting it to Christ. "Who is sufficient for these things? " By no instrument can a work so mighty, so divine, be accomplished, but by the instrument with which Jesus triumphed- the cross of Calvary. "We preach Christ crucified" -literally, Christ on the cross- was the simple but sublime declaration of the chief of the

apostles. "The preaching of the cross is to those who perish foolishness; but unto us which believe it is the power of God." "The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." And how significant yet touching the words of the Crucified Himself: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Such is the doctrine the revealed Word of God teaches, such the truth the Holy Spirit owns, such the weapon the minister of the cross wields, and such its marvellous power and result. Are you a Christian minister? Beloved brother, behold your divine, invincible weapon! The Cross of Christ! Preach Christ, and Christ only! Lift Him up higher and higher, exalt Him more and more, and you shall not have mournfully to exclaim, "Who has believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" *The Holy Spirit will the most honor that ministry that the most honors Christ's cross.* He who preaches the Church and not Christ, who puts ordinances in the place of the atoning blood, or who veils the cross by human learning and philosophy and the traditions of men- the power and the wisdom of this world, which is weakness and foolishness with God; stands in a position of terrible responsibility, is accumulating a fearful amount of guilt, and is laying up a solemn and awful account of his stewardship unto God. But preach Christ crucified, and the results, for which you are not responsible, you can safely leave to them unto whom alone they belong. No other preaching will meet the case of our hearers. No other theme will the Holy Spirit bless to the conversion of sinners, and to the instruction, comfort, and sanctification of the saints. All other preaching- preaching which has not Christ crucified for its beginning, its center, and its end, is solemn trifling with souls and with eternity- a splendid impertinence, a burlesque of the gospel, a dishonor to God, the murder of souls, whose blood, staining our garments, God will require at our hands. Oh, whatever you do, preach CHRIST! Preach Him in His Godhead- preach Him in His manhood- preach Him as the Revealer of the Father- preach Him in His finished work- preach Him in His personal beauty- preach Him in His love, grace, and sympathy- preach Him as the all in all of the soul bound to His judgment-seat- preach Him scripturally and intelligently, lovingly and winningly; in the pulpit, out of the pulpit, living and dying, oh, raise high the cross of Christ!

Woe to the men who tear away the cross
Sole prop and pillar of a sinking world.
If its foundation by unhallowed hands
Be undermined, what, what can give support?
But hush, my fears! it rests not on the sand;
The raging waves that dash against its base
Sink harmless, after foaming out their shame.
It is when the *cross* is preached, and only then,
That from the pulpit a mysterious power
Goes forth to renovate the moral man.
He that without it wields

The sacred sword, at best in mock display,
A useless weapon flourishes in its sheath,
None feel its edge-none fear it. — Wilcox.

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