

The Foot of the Cross

Christ Crucified the Center of Christian Union

By Octavius Winslow

"You are all one in Christ Jesus." – Gal. 3:28.

The unfolding of our subject approaches its close. Imperfect as the discussion manifestly is- as imperfect, indeed, must be the most elaborate unfolding of such a theme- it would be yet more- marked in the omission of the topic which in the present chapter will engage the reader's attention- Christ crucified the center of Christian union, and of holy fellowship to all true believers of God's one Church. Our subject is in perfect and beautiful harmony with one of the most touching petitions in the intercessory prayer of Jesus when on earth. "That they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you have sent me." This clearly was the great truth which the apostle seeks to illustrate. "You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There [that is, in Christ] is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." His argument is- the Lord Jesus is the Center, and in Him all national, ecclesiastical, and religious differences subsisting in the one Church of God are merged and lost, as rays in the sun, as rivers in the ocean- and Christ is all and in all. The union of the Lord's people is a subject dear to His heart, closely connected with His glory, and inseparable from their own holiness, happiness, and usefulness. May the Divine Spirit aid and bless the presentation of this delightful truth, while we consider the center- the unity- the blessings and the obligations which result therefrom.

THE CENTER of Christian union is the center of Christianity- Christ Crucified. Destroy the focus of any system, and the system itself is destroyed. Remove the center, and you have broken up that which held the whole in cohesion and unity. For example- taking our illustration from Divine truth- deny the Deity of Christ, and you deny the Atonement of Christ, for the two cardinal articles of our faith stand or fall together. The sacrifice of Christ, as a vindication of God's moral government, and as the only expedient of the soul's salvation, reposes wholly upon the Essential Godhead of His person. If Christ is not God, He is not a Savior. A mere human savior could not bring a sinner to heaven. Destroy, then, the Atonement, ignore the sacrificial death of Christ, and you have destroyed and rejected the only foundation upon which a lost soul can build his hope of glory.

Now, a great and essential doctrine is placed before you here. All believers are ONE in Christ Jesus. They have a vital union with Jesus Himself. This is a higher truth than that which affirms that they know Him, love Him, and have faith in Him; that they put their trust alone in His blood and righteousness, and have confessed Him before men. All these are precious truths- God make them yet more precious to our hearts. But, the grand truth, the source of all the rest, is this- I, as a believer in Christ, am in Him eternally, in Him spiritually, in Him indissolubly, in Him vitally. And because I am thus one with Christ Jesus I know Him- knowing Him, I love Him- loving Him, I obey Him- and obeying Him, I find my heaven begun on earth. All these living, precious springs have their origin in this grand truth- "I am one with Christ the Lord."

As long as a man is out of Christ Jesus, he is in a most awful and perilous condition. We ask not what ecclesiastical form of government he may prefer; or what his creed is. If he has no spiritual union with the Lord Jesus Christ, he is in an unsaved and imminently perilous state. Do you inquire who are **out** of Christ? I answer, and God grant that you may apply the statement to your own conscience- if you have never repented of your sins- if your heart has never been broken by the blessed Spirit- if you have never placed your mouth in the dust, and cried, God be merciful to me a sinner! -you are out of Christ. All unbelievers are out of Christ. And who are unbelievers? Perchance you are thinking of the bold, unblushing infidel; the man who denies the inspiration of the Scriptures, and laughs to scorn the divine revelations of the Holy Spirit. Little do you think that you, in your 'practical' rejection of the Lord Jesus, may be virtually that infidel, that unbeliever! If, in faith, you have not received Jesus, though He has been standing knocking at the door of your heart until His locks are wet with the dew of the morning; you are that unbeliever, that infidel; and as an unbeliever, rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ, you have no union with Christ- you are out of Christ! Poor Pharisee! wrapping around you the wretched figment of your own righteousness, looking at your own works, trusting in your religious duties, going about to establish a righteousness of your own, never having been brought to know your condemnation under the law, never having been brought to see that all your virtues are but splendid sins, that all upon which you do pride and plume yourself is in God's sight obnoxious and loathsome- you are out of Christ!

And you, poor religious formalist! who has put on Christ outwardly- perhaps has gone to His table, and yet are holding an empty lamp of Christian profession, destitute of one particle of saving grace- with all your splendid profession, your outward zeal, and religious formality, you have no oneness with Christ! And how shall I describe to you the awful condition in which this state of separation from Christ places you? To be out of Christ is to be exposed to the condemnation of the law; to be out of Christ is to have

no hiding-place, no Savior, no Redeemer; to be out of Christ is to be unsheltered from the wrath to come. It is to live a godless life, and to die a hopeless death! Think of the antediluvians! Perhaps many of them assisted to construct the ark,

while they yet laughed to scorn the warnings and entreaties of the righteous man of God. But when the ark was complete, and the chosen vessels of mercy had entered it, and God had shut them in, the heaven was darkened, the lightning flashed, the thunder pealed, the waters descended, the floods came and swept them all away, and they were lost, because they were not in the ark! Yearning for your conversion, we warn you of the wrath to come, and tell you that, unless you have a spiritual union with the Lord Jesus, unless you are enclosed in Christ, you have no refuge from the storm, no hiding-place from the wind, no covert from the tempest of the wrath of the holy and the just Lord God!

But now we turn to the converse of this truth- a far more precious and delightful theme. All believers are in Christ Jesus, loved in Him, and eternally elected in Him. Deem not this a dry doctrinal truth, having in it no sanctifying influence. We believe it to be one of the most Christ-exalting, God-glorifying, soul-sanctifying truths that a minister of Christ could possibly bring before you. Trace up all the precious springs of grace and love to the fountain-head from where they flow- God's eternal love to, and choice of, you in Christ Jesus your covenant Head. Let your faith and love thus follow these precious springs of grace until they bring you to the fountain- God's everlasting love to you in Christ Jesus your Lord. It is delightful to think how God treasured up from eternity in this very act of His own love all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus our Head. When God called you by His free and sovereign grace, He called you in Christ, and to Christ. You could not resist the blessed call, because it was the effectual call of the Holy Spirit which brought you to see your worthlessness and vileness. The great office of the Spirit is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, and in nothing does He more glorify Christ than in calling a poor sinner away from his own righteousness, his religious formality, to accept Christ Jesus the Lord as all his righteousness and all his salvation.

There is included, too, this great and precious truth- acceptance and justification in Christ Jesus. What is justification? It is our union with Christ Jesus. If we are in a state of acceptance- in a justified state- standing before God in a state of completeness- it is because we are one in Christ Jesus. "Christ is made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." If we stand before the Holy One pardoned and justified, it is because Jesus has washed us in His precious blood, and has invested us with His imputed righteousness. Some of my readers may have been for months looking at their own selves. Would you know a true believer's experience? Then may the Lord take your eyes away from your sinful self, and your righteous self, and empty self, and give you to see that in Christ Jesus, washed in His blood, clothed in His righteousness, you have passed into a present state of full forgiveness and complete acceptance, and God rests in His love and rejoices over you with singing. There is for you now no condemnation.

Again, this being in Christ involves our preservation. The child of God is kept not by any power of his own. If God were to leave us to our own keeping, before we reposed our head upon our pillow we would fall to the breaking of our bones and

the destruction of our peace. Child of God, God is teaching you every day the great truth, "KEPT by the power of God, through faith unto salvation." "Preserved in Christ," through all the long years of our rebellion, impenitence, and unbelief; and since we have been brought to know Christ, still each moment kept by the power of God unto eternal salvation.

And when the solemn hour comes, as come it will, that shall terminate this brief existence and summon you into the invisible world, oh, what a delightful truth will it then be to lay your dying head upon- "I am in Christ Jesus. I am a dying man in a living Savior. Why need I fear to die? Why need I shrink from the separation of the spirit from the body? Why need I tremble to enter upon a world unknown?" Oh, to die in Christ is but to languish into life. You who have been for years trembling in the anticipation of death, all your lifetime subject to its bondage, cast to the winds all your doubts and fears. When you die, you will die in the Lord- in a spiritual union with the Lord, from which neither death nor life shall separate you, and so you shall be forever with the Lord.

And then comes the consummation- in Christ now, and with Christ hereafter! We hardly know whether we are right in unveiling the solemn sacredness of a dying room, and yet we find it hard to resist quoting a striking and impressive remark recently made by a suffering and dying prelate, Archbishop Wheatley. He had made the science of botany a study; and when a clergy man pointed to some beautiful flowers by his bed, asking him if he thought there were flowers in heaven, the reply of the dying saint was, "I cannot tell; I suppose that we shall find when we get to heaven a total reverse of many of our previous notions of what it is; but this I know, as I get nearer to it, the heaven of heavens to me is, to be with Christ." Oh, it is a heaven in itself to be with Christ, to fall at His feet, to be raised in His arms, to repose on His loving breast. If you are in Christ now, however feeble your grasp, or dull your perception of Christ, or fluctuating your hope of being with Christ may be, the feeblest faith that takes hold of Christ, the dimmest eye that sees Christ now, insures your being forever with Christ when He shall send His chariot to waft you to Himself.

THE UNITY.

But we pass from this consideration of the oneness of all believers with Christ to the consequent UNITY OF ALL BELIEVERS WITH EACH OTHER. The unity of the Church of Christ does not spring out of anything in that Church, but out of the oneness of that Church in Christ. Unity pervades all God's works and operations- unity, not uniformity. We find a marvellous richness of diversity in all the creations of God. Study, my reader, this diversity in God's operations. If we address anyone who has doubts touching the fundamental doctrine of revealed religion, the being of a God, we ask him to take up that one evidence, the vast diversity of God's operations, unfolding the infinite affluence of God's mind, heart, wisdom, and power; and see if it will not bring him to the logical conclusion that this vast

wealth, this infinite diversity, must spring from an Infinite Being. And yet, there is unity- unity of design, of purpose, of action, all springing from the unity of His being. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord."

We see this unity that pervades God's works and operations, marvelously exhibited in the essential oneness of His Church. God has but one Church. "My beloved is one." Many sections, but one Church; many apartments, but one house; many stones, but one temple; many tents, but one camp; many flocks, but one fold. There is unity and there is diversity. The family of God is essentially one, and yet constituted into different households.

Now, we would remind you, in the first place, that the unity of the Church of God grows out of the unity of all believers in Christ the one Head. All true believers hold Christ the one Head of the Church. There may be diversities of judgment touching minor points in the interpretation of God's Word, but all believers in Christ hold the headship of Christ. The apostle speaks of some spurious religionists as not "holding the Head;" but all true believers hold Christ to be the Head of the Church- the Head of her vitality, of her strength, of her power, of her glory. Does not this, then, place before us, in a most striking point of view, the essential oneness of the Church of God?

Then, again, the essential unity of the Church consists in the indwelling of the same Spirit. Every believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit. All believers in Christ, then, are essentially one. The same Divine Spirit who brought you to see your lost condition and led you to Jesus, who is carrying on the work of grace in your heart, leading you on higher and higher, to a state of fitness for heaven, is the same Spirit who dwells alike in all God's people; and this recognition of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in every converted soul ought to draw us closer and closer in fellowship and love to the brethren. If I stand aloof from a brother- if I withhold my fellowship- refuse to co-operate with him in the work of the Lord Jesus- to refuse to admit him to my communion, because he does not belong to my section of the Christian Church- I grieve, wound, and dishonor that same Divine Spirit that dwells in my soul, I bring a leanness into my own spirit, I quench, in a great measure, the gracious influence of that Spirit in my own heart. Lay to heart this thought. Turn it into prayer. We believe through the power of the Spirit it will annihilate all the jealousy, envy, coldness, and distance that so much separates us from our brother in Christ.

And what a glorious view of the essential unity of the Church does salvation present to the eye! Look at the one Church of God. On what platform does it stand? What is its foundation? Where do all believers look for pardon, for acceptance, for sanctifying grace? Where do they wash day by day the constant contractions of guilt? Where do they look for present peace and future hope? Are they not all hanging on Christ? Are they not all clinging to Christ? Do they not all wash in the blood of Christ? Do not all put on the one righteousness of Christ? Are they not all living on Christ as their sanctification? Surely this were enough to

place in the background, all those ecclesiastical systems that sever and sunder us from our brethren, and unite them in Christian union and fellowship. This were enough to make us say, "The minor points on which we differ are of no importance in comparison, and they shall not be allowed to sunder us in love, in sympathy, in labor. But the grand essential points on which we are agreed, shall be a bond of union and fellowship from this time forth and for evermore."

And how much is there in the circumstances of a child of God to unfold the essential unity of the Church of God! We have the same trials, afflictions, temptations; we tread oftentimes the same dreary, lonely, toilsome path. Oh, how much is there in God's providential dealings with us in our trials, our sorrows, our temptations, to knit the saints of God more closely to their Head!

THE OBLIGATIONS.

In conclusion, let us remark that there grows out of this great and precious truth some solemn obligations and precious blessings. First, with regard to obligations set forth in the Scriptures. If we are in Christ, and Christ is the center of our union, then we are bound to recognize the unity of God's Church. We are to hail a brother in Christ as a brother wherever we find him. We are to recognize his Christianity, his relation to the family of God, his faith in the Savior. We are to recognize him- whatever his ecclesiastical position may be- as no longer a stranger and alien, but a fellow-citizen of the saints and of the household of God. Recognizing this, we ought to express it. I think that this was the meaning of the petition our dear Lord breathed to heaven. He did not ask the Father that His Church might be one; it was one. He did not pray that they might be more one with each another; they were essentially so. But, what the Great High Priest asked of God was, that this unity, this oneness, might be manifested, that this union might be visible, that the world, beholding it, might believe in the divinity of His person and His mission. The world is a keen observer of the Church of God. The world cares not one iota how much we differ on points of church government, or of doctrine, but the world looks at the Church of God, in its union. It expects to find oneness, brotherly love, sympathy, co-operation. Therefore we earnestly implore you first, to recognize the unity of all God's dear saints with one another, and then manfully and unhesitatingly to express and illustrate it.

Added to this, we would earnestly implore you, as another obligation springing from this truth, to promote and remove the stumbling-blocks out of the way of Christian union. It may occasion you some self-denial. You may have a cross to

take up in doing this. You may lose the confidence, the affection, the friendship of some. But it is worth a sacrifice to remove a stone out of the way of the glorious work of Christian union. Oh, what were the chilled affection and weakened confidence of a fellow-Christian compared with the promotion of brotherly love and Christian union among all God's dear saints! To heal the divisions in the rent robe of our blessed Emmanuel, to draw brother to brother, minister to minister,

church to church, oh, think of the glory, honor, and praise that will accrue by that act of yours to the blessed name of our wondrous, glorious Emmanuel! And when you place your dying head upon your pillow, and are about to stand in the presence of Jesus, do you do you think will for a moment regret having made some sacrifice of feeling, friendship, or affection, in order to draw closer and closer the bonds that unite the members of the one elect, redeemed, and saved Church of God?

THE BLESSINGS.

We advert for a moment to the blessings that will accrue from your recognition and manifestation of this great and glorious truth- the essential unity of the Church. Let me remind you that your happiness will be promoted by it. You cannot be happy so long as you stand aloof from a Christian church, a minister, or a brother, because he utters not your shibboleth, kneels not at your altar, because his form of worship or of church government assimilates not to your own. No! you cannot be happy. But, oh, the sacred delight of realizing our oneness! We have augmented our happiness in drawing around us closer the cords of love in a brother's heart- in having secured his confidence, inspired his

love, and acquired an interest in his prayers. Oh, the happiness of soaring above denominational differences, and breathing the purer, holier, serener atmosphere that floats around the cross of Calvary, where all ecclesiastical and denominational distinctions are entirely lost.

And not only your happiness but your holiness will be promoted by your recognition of brotherly love. It is not a holy and healthful state of mind to stand aloof from a church, a minister, or a private Christian, because they belong not to our own section of the Christian Church; but it is a holy and healthful state to be walking in love with all who love Christ, rising above these outer forms of separation, and recognizing only our common salvation, our common Lord, our union to our glorious and blessed Head. Do you want to be more holy, more happy, more useful? Do you want to assimilate more closely to the image of your Lord and Master? Then, extend your arms of love, sympathy, and companionship, and embrace, as He embraces, irrespective of party or ecclesiastical distinction, or form of worship, all those who own the one living and glorious Head.

We will only add that usefulness is another blessing that springs from the recognition and manifestation of Christian union. Beloved, we are useful for Christ, not so much as we stand apart in our individual, isolated condition; as in combination- combination of judgment, of heart, of purpose. This promotes our usefulness. Do you want to be useful in Christ's Church? Do you want to augment your practical influence in the service of your Master? Then, we beseech you, co-operate with all the Lord's people in advancing the kingdom of Christ, in circulating God's holy Word, in distributing religious tracts, in promoting

Christian missions. Co-operate with every church organization in His blessed work. Link and unite yourselves with them, and you will augment vastly that usefulness in the service of Christ, to which, we trust, the Lord by His grace has called you.

We have adverted to the solemn hour of our departure, when, standing in a near view of the eternal world, we look back upon the past. Oh, then, how low, pitiful, and contemptible will appear all the little divisions that sundered us from God's dear saints, when we are about to stand in the presence of the Holy One, and spring into the fellowship of the "general assembly and Church of the First-born which are written in heaven, and to the spirits of just men made perfect." God has seen fit to take to the Church above, some of the earliest and most devoted friends of Christian union. Do you think that in heaven they repent of having crossed the threshold- of having overlooked their ecclesiastical walls- and of having united in sympathy and co-operation with God's dear saints? Oh, no! The Church of God on earth and in heaven is but one Church; and we believe that the glory and happiness of our friends in heaven is immensely increased in the recollection of having when on earth, done something to promote brotherly love and union in the Church of Christ.

Oh, let us live more in vivid realization of that solemn hour that shall transfer the Church on earth, freed from all its imperfections and deficiencies, to the Church of the glorified in heaven, where we shall be perfectly and eternally one!

"One army of the living God,
At His command we bow;
Part of the host have crossed the flood,
And part are crossing now.

"The Church triumphant in Your love,
Their mighty joys we know;
They sing the Lamb in hymns above,
And we in hymns below."

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