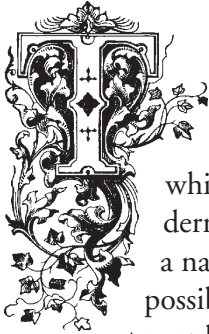




## LEANING UPON THE BELOVED

By Octavius Winslow

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?”—Song of Solomon 8:3.



he path of the believer is an *ascent*, from a dark path and desolate world under the dominion of sin and Satan, to a bright and glorious world, where God and holiness supremely and eternally reign. The first step, which he takes in this heavenly journey, is out of the wilderness of a wrecked and ruined nature, into the glories of a nature new and divine. Until this be done, there cannot possibly be any right direction or real progress of the soul towards heaven. Years may be exhausted in the rigid performance of religious duties—sacraments, fasts, charities, pilgrimages—but they count with God for nothing; they but fetter and impede, rather than free and propel the spirit in its holy and heavenly course. All these self-endeavors must cease; all these human doings must be abandoned. Conversion, the conversion of which Jesus spake to Nicodemus, is the severance of the sinner from himself, his divorcement from his wedded attachment to a broken law of Works, a legal righteousness, and his simple escape to the refuge set before him in the Gospel. There is no turning of the face to the Saviour, until there is a turning of the back upon self. No man is in Christ, savingly and sensibly, until he is out of himself, legally and meritoriously. No man will enfold himself with the righteousness which, is of God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, until, seeing the utter worthlessness of his own, he renounces it at once and forever. This single step taken, it becomes the first of a series, each one

constituting a daily coming up out of self, conducting the believer nearer and nearer to perfect and endless glory.

That the Christian's path should wind its way along an ascent, sometimes steep and perilous, always difficult and toilsome, should awaken no surprise and create no murmur. There is ever this great encouragement, this light upon his way, that it is a heaven-pointing, a heaven-conducting, a heaven-terminating path; and ere long the weary pilgrim will reach its sunlit summit; not to lie down and die there, as Moses did upon the top of Pisgah, but to commence a life of perfect purity and of eternal bliss. Turn your eye, dear reader, and rest it for a moment upon the beautiful picture, which Solomon presents, to your view in his inspired song. To what is the world compared? a wilderness. What object is seen in this wilderness? the church of God. What is she doing? she is coming up from the wilderness. What company is she in? the company of her Beloved. By what is she strengthened and upheld in her journey? she is leaning upon her Beloved. And what does the sacred painter describe as the effect of this spectacle? it excites the admiration and astonishment of all who behold it, and they exclaim:—“*Who* is this that cometh up from the wilderness leaning upon the Beloved?” To one feature of this graphic description of the Church of God, let us turn our attention, viz. the posture of the believer in his ascent from the wilderness—*leaning* upon Jesus.

The object of the believer's trust is Jesus, his Beloved. He is spoken of by the apostle as “*the* Beloved,” as though he would say, “There is but *one* beloved of God, of angels, of saints—it is Jesus.” He is the beloved One of the Father. “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, *in whom my soul delighteth*.” “The only begotten Son, *which is in the bosom of the Father*.” “This is my beloved Son, *in whom I am well pleased*.” If Jesus is thus so dear to the Father, what then must be the turpitude of the sin of rejecting him!—a sin, let it be remembered, of which even Satan cannot be guilty. Yes; he is the beloved of God; and therefore, coming to God through him, it is impossible that a believing soul can be rejected.

But he is also the church's beloved, the beloved of each member of that church. Thus can each one exclaim, “This is my beloved, and this is my friend. He is ten thousand times more glorious to my view and

precious to my soul, because he is *mine*. His *person* is beloved, uniting all the glories of the Godhead with all the perfections of the manhood. His *work* is beloved, saving his people from the entire guilt, and condemnation, and dominion of their sins. His commandments are beloved, because they are the dictates of his love to us, and the tests of our love to him." O, yes! you have but *one* beloved of your heart, dear believer. He is "white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand;" he is all the universe to you; heaven would be no heaven without him; and with his presence here, earth seems often like the opening portal of heaven. He loved you, he labored for you, he died for you, he rose for you, he lives and intercedes for you in glory; and all that is lovely in him, and all that is grateful in you, constrain you to exclaim:—"I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." Such is the company in which the believer is journeying through, and coming up from, the wilderness. Was ever a poor pilgrim more honored? Was ever a lonely traveller in better company? How can you be solitary or sorrowful, be in peril or suffer need, while you are journeying homewards in company with, and leaning upon, Jesus? But for what are you to lean upon your Beloved?

You are to lean upon Jesus *for your entire salvation*. He is "made of God unto you wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption;" and for each one of these inestimable blessings, you are to depend daily upon Christ. Where can you lean for pardon but upon the atoning blood of Jesus? Where can you lean for acceptance, but upon the justifying righteousness of Jesus? And where can you lean for sanctification, but upon the sin-subduing grace of Jesus? This leaning upon the Beloved, then, is a daily coming up out of ourselves in the great matter of our salvation, and resting in the finished work of Christ, nay more, in Christ himself. We are to lean upon Jesus for a constant sense of pardon; to be coming perpetually to the blood of sprinkling, thus preserving the conscience clean and tender, and maintaining a filial, loving, and close walk with God.

You are to lean upon *the fulness* of your Beloved. He is full to a sufficiency for all the wants of his people. There cannot possibly occur a circumstance in your history, there cannot arise a necessity in your ease, in which you may not repair to the infinite fulness which the Fa-

ther has laid up in Christ for his church in the wilderness. Why, then, seek in your poverty what can only be found in Christ's riches? why look to your emptiness, when you may repair to his fulness? "My grace is sufficient for thee," is the cheering declaration with which Jesus meets every turn in your path, every crook in your lot, every want in your journey. Distrust, then, your own wisdom, look from your own self, and lean your entire weight upon the infinite fulness that is in Christ.

The posture is expressive of conscious weakness, and deep self-distrust. Who is more feeble than a child of God? Taught the lesson of his weakness in the region of his own heart, and still learning it in his stumblings and falls, and mistakes many and painful, in his self-inflicted wounds and dislocations, he is at length brought to feel that all his strength is out of himself, in another. He has the "sentence of death in himself, that he should not trust in himself." "I am weak, yea, weakness itself," is his language, "I am as a reed, shaken of the wind; I stumble at a feather; I tremble at an echo; I start at my own shadow; the smallest difficulty impedes me; the least temptation overcomes me. How shall I ever fight my way through this mighty host, and reach in safety the world of bliss?" By leaning daily, hourly, moment by moment, upon your Beloved for strength. Christ is the power of God, and he is the power of the children of God. Who can strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees but Jesus? In them that have no might, he increaseth strength. When they are weak in themselves, then are they strong in him. His declaration is:—"My strength is made perfect in weakness." It is illustrated, it shines forth, and is exhibited in its perfection and glory in upholding, keeping, and succoring the weak of his flock. Lean, then, upon Jesus for strength. He has strength for all your weakness; he can strengthen your faith, and strengthen your hope, and strengthen your courage, and strengthen your patience, and strengthen your heart, for every burden, and for every trial, and for every temptation. Lean upon him; he loves to feel the pressure of your arm; he loves you to link your feebleness to his almightiness, to avail yourself of his grace. Thus leaning off yourself upon Christ, "as your day so shall your strength be." In all your tremblings and sinkings, you will feel the encircling of his power. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

And where would you lean *in sorrow* but upon the bosom of your Beloved? If you lean upon his arm for support, it is equally your privilege to lean upon his heart for sympathy. Christ is as much your consolation, as he is your strength. His heart is a human heart, a sinless heart, a tender heart, a heart once the home of sorrow, once stricken with grief, once an aching, bleeding, mournful heart.

Thus disciplined and trained, Jesus knows how to pity and to succor them that are sorrowful and solitary. He loves to chase grief from the spirit, to bind up the broken heart, to staunch the bleeding wound, and to dry the weeping eye, to “comfort *all* that mourn.” It is his delight to visit you in the dark night-season of your sorrow, and to come to you walking upon the tempestuous billows of your grief, breathing music and diffusing calmness over your scene of sadness and gloom. When other bosoms are closed to your sorrow, or are removed beyond your reach, or their deep throbbings of love are stilled in death,—when the fiery darts of Satan fly thick around you, and the world frowns, and the saints are cold, and your path is sad and desolate, and all stand aloof from your *sore*,—*then* lean upon the love, lean upon the grace, lean upon the faithfulness, lean upon the tender sympathy of Jesus. That bosom will always unveil to welcome you. It will ever be an asylum to receive you, and a home to shelter you. Never will its love cool, nor its tenderness lessen, nor its sympathy be exhausted, nor its pulse of affection cease to beat. You may have grieved it a thousand times over, you may have pierced it through and through, again and again,—yet, returning to its deathless love, penitent and lowly, sorrowful and humble, you may lay within it your weeping, aching, languid head, depositing every burden, reposing every sorrow and breathing every sigh upon the heart of Jesus. Lord! to whom shall I go? yea, to whom *would* I go, but unto thee!

This posture of faith is equally expressive of the *advancement* of the soul. The church was seen leaning, but not stationary. She was strengthened and upheld of her Lord, but she was *going forward*. She was leaning and walking, walking and leaning. The power she was deriving from Christ stimulated her greater progress. She gathered strength from her close dealing with her Lord, only to employ that strength in urging her upward, heavenward, homeward way. It was not the posture of indo-

lence, in which individual responsibility was lost sight of in conscious weakness, and weakness was made an excuse for slothfulness and drowsiness of spirit. We lean truly upon Jesus that we may advance in all holiness, that the grace of the Spirit may be quickened and stimulated, that we may cultivate more heavenly-mindedness, and be constantly coming up from the world, following him without the camp, bearing his reproach. O! what encouragement have we here to cultivate heavenly-mindedness, since for the task, so difficult, yet so pleasing, we may lean upon the all-sufficiency of our Lord's grace. Let our movement, then, be an advance; let our path be upward; let us gather around us the trailing garment, casting away whatever impedes rather than accelerates our progress; and leaning upon our Beloved, hasten from all below, until we find ourselves actually reposing in the bosom upon which, in faith and love, in weakness and sorrow, we had rested amidst the trials and perils of the ascent.

What more appropriate, what more soothing truth could we bring before you, suffering Christian, than this? *You are sick*,—lean upon Jesus. His sick ones are peculiarly dear to his heart. *You* are dear to him. In all your pains and languishings, faintings and lassitude, Jesus is with you; for he created that frame, he remembers that it is but dust, and he bids you lean upon him, and leave your sickness and its issue entirely in his hands. *You are oppressed*,—lean upon Jesus. He will undertake your cause, and committing it thus into his hands, he will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday. *You are lonely*,—lean upon Jesus. Sweet will be the communion, and close the fellowship which you may thus hold with him, your heart burning within you while he talks with you by the way. Is the ascent steep and difficult? lean upon your Beloved. Is the path straight and narrow? lean upon your Beloved. Do intricacies, and perplexities, and trials weave your network around your feet? lean upon your Beloved. Has death smitten down the strong arm, and chilled the tender heart, upon which you were wont to recline? lean upon your Beloved. O! lean upon Jesus in every strait, in every want, in every sorrow, in every temptation. Nothing is too insignificant, nothing too mean to take to Christ. It is enough that you want Christ to warrant you in coming to Christ. No excuse need you make for repairing to him; no apology will he require for the frequency of your approach; he loves to have you quite near to him, to

hear your voice, and to feel the confidence of your faith, and the pressure of your love. Ever remember that there is a place in the heart of Christ sacred to you, and which no one can fill but yourself, and from which none may dare exclude you. And when you are dying, O! lay your languishing head upon the bosom of your Beloved, and fear not the foe and dread not the passage, for his rod and staff they will comfort you. On that bosom, the beloved disciple leaned at supper; on that bosom the martyr Stephen laid his bleeding brow in death; and on that bosom, you, too, beloved, may repose, living or dying, soothed, succored, and sheltered by your Saviour and your Lord.

“Jesus can make a dying bed  
Feel soft as downy pillows are,  
While on his breast I lean my head,  
And breathe my soul out sweetly there.”

Thus leaning ever on Jesus, how sweet will be your song in the night of your pilgrimage. “Blessed be the Lord, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped! therefore my heart greatly rejoiced, and with my song will I praise him.”

“Holy Saviour, friend unseen,  
Since on thine arm thou bidd’st me lean,  
Help me throughout life’s varying scene,  
By faith to cling to thee!

“Blest with this fellowship divine,  
Take what thou wilt, I’ll ne’er repine;  
E’en as the branches to the vine,  
My soul would cling to thee.

“Far from her home, fatigued, oppress’d,  
Here site has found her place of rest;  
An exile still, yet not unblest  
While she can cling to thee.

“Without a murmur, I dismiss  
 My former dreams of earthly bliss;  
 My joy, my consolation, this—  
     Each hour to cling to thee.

“What though the world deceitful prove,  
 And earthly friends and joys remove;  
 With patient, uncomplaining love,  
     Still would, I cling to thee.

“Oft when I seem to tread alone  
 Some barren waste with thorns o’ergrown,  
 Thy voice of love, in tenderest tone,  
     Whispers, “Still cling to ME.”

“Though faith and hope awhile be tried,  
 I ask not, need not, aught beside;  
 How safe, how calm, how satisfied,  
     The soul that clings to thee.

“They fear not Satan, or the grave,  
 They feel thee near, and strong to save,  
 Nor fear to cross e’en Jordan’s wave,  
     Because they cling to thee.

“Blest is my lot, whate’er befall;  
 What can disturb me, what appall,  
 Whilst as my rock, my strength, my all,  
     Jesus! I cling to thee?”

