

## Glorying in the Cross

*From the Epistle: Galatians vi. 11.*

**11** Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand. **12** As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised ; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. **13** For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised , that they may glory in your flesh. **14** But God forbid that I should glory , save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. **15** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. **16** And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. **17** From henceforth let no man trouble me : for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. **18** Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

*But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*

From my very earliest days as a believer, this sentence of Scripture has borne special significance for me. It seemed especially precious because its immediate results were manifest: the power of those influences that had nearly destroyed me was broken — whether dangerous habits, or the bondage of a foolish and careless lifestyle— allowing the commencement of a slow but very real process of healing that would otherwise never have happened. I also noted a change of attitude: that all-consuming drive for success and the ambitions that rule this culture had lost their dominating control. I was astonished that Calvary’s Cross, set upon that dark hill two millennia ago, could produce such wonders in the life of a modern man. And I saw it happening among many of my peers, as well.

For St. Paul, this same transformative effect was very personal. His epistle to the Galatians, as we are aware, is an impassioned effort to dissuade these Christians from abandoning the freedom that the Cross has wrought for them, in favor of embracing Law-observance. The Apostle had himself been dramatically torn away from enslavement to the letter of the Law by his conversion. He had become *a new creature*. The difference, to him, was one of night and day, and he desperately fought anything that would place the New Testament Church back under the pall of legalism.

I want to focus upon only two things today. First, this: the *world* —its size, its influence, its scope, its power, its pervasion— is very, very great. This is especially so in our times in which *the world* is commandingly present in everything. The change has been slow and subtle, and so it is only uncommon effort that will permit us to perceive it, for we ourselves are constantly subject to it. Secondly, however, I want to speak of the power of the Cross as it will serve to rescue — and continue to rescue— us. For the Cross involved a decisive act: that of execution, the execution of God’s only Son— and it is the understanding of the significance of this fact alone that will suffice to assure us that *the world* need not win in its struggle to consume the Church.

The world has come against the Church, as it were, in two very different but equally powerful modes. All of us are aware of a host of political and ideological issues that differentiate the orthodox church from those around it. These differences have proliferated, and the Church has understandably struggled in its effort to articulate its own stance, while maintaining its mission in the world: to reach out to the lost, and provide a safe haven of untroubled worship for God's people. We have pored through the Scriptures, and examined the writings of our spiritual forbears, in order to intelligently and effectively present why we believe as we do. We have striven to offer answers compassionately but forcefully to those who challenge us, while attempting to retain our Christian deportment, all the while. It is no small battle.

But the world also attempts to exercise tremendous power in areas to which we all are subject: *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world* warns the Apostle John (1 John 2:16). It has been far easier for American Christians to congratulate themselves that they are effectively engaging the world in the area of polemics, than to prove themselves separate from its *lusts*. Our cultural and spiritual enemies laugh at our expressions of righteous indignation because they do not see the witness of purity and holiness among us that are even more the certification of Kingdom membership than any effective arguments we could mount. This is not a conflict that political representatives alone —even good, wholesome, Christian ones— can ever win. No, it is the Church's war. She must wage it on all levels, but the consequence will be no better that that which you and I wage on her behalf, individually.

What is the key to such an extraordinary conflict? The Cross, *by whom the world is crucified unto [us] and [we] unto the world!* All that man has spawned apart from God has at the Cross received its just sentence, and it has been carried out. To be crucified is to be executed. It implies absolute separation, as well, because death completely separates the living from the dead. There stands between us and the world a protective barrier as high as the highest heavens, as deep as hell itself, as broad as the universe, and it is the Cross of Christ. The reality of the Cross remains undimmed through the passage of time, because its victory is outside of time. No matter how magnificently and grandly the world proliferates its influence and the means it uses to advance it, the Cross remains an effective boundary between it and the Church that cannot be crossed, provided —and this is essential— that the Church *reckons its life in accordance with this truth.*

...*And [we are crucified] unto the world.* If we are crucified, we are dead, as dead as execution implies. If we are indeed dead, there is nothing for the world to work with. It has no use for the dead. They can neither be charmed, nor influenced, nor bullied, nor exploited. But again,

these principles are only as good as the Church *reckons* them to be, *i.e.*, believes them to be true and stakes her very existence upon them.

The Cross is all that St. Paul will allow himself to glory in. It is, however, an incredibly humble, unattractive, and inglorious object... a means of barbarous torture, invented by wicked men with wicked intent. I would sooner identify myself with a famous personality, or a noble idea, or a lovely landscape— yes, almost anything other than such a grim concept. For it not only brings to the mind's eye the awful scene of Christ's death, but —if I am willing to go there— the blackness of my sins that produced such a dreadful consequence. It forces me to *glory* in something that leaves me no shred of pride nor personal accomplishment to which I can cling. It says nothing good about me whatsoever, and only offers me affirmation insofar as I submit to it. The Cross reduces the entire span of human endeavor —saving only that which has been consecrated to its glory— to mere dust and rubble at its blood-stained base.

To know that *the world has been crucified to us* should provide us with no small measure of comfort, in times when the world can't get enough of celebrating its own magnificence. It has with apparent ease dismissed the Church and its teachings as outmoded, inapplicable, and even —if it can get away with it— criminal and anti-human. Many people are so detached from the Church that they have no effective way of countering this influence, even if they wanted to, so they are taken easily by the flood of scorn and ridicule heaped upon the Church by those with the power and position to do so. Let it rage as it will... it is *crucified to us*. But we must live this out.

And to know that *we are crucified to the world* should likewise grant us a sense of protection. Should I walk in this truth, I will be provided the power —minute by minute, encounter by encounter, as the need arises— to resist the influences which, if they can't win me by argument, or intimidate me by the threat of force, will seek to woo and win me by other means.

What's the point of pretending that things are different? We must be realists, and assess the current situation as it is. It is faith that will supply us with every necessary thing, but most especially, with a knowledge of the Cross of Christ —“towering over the wrecks of time”— that, in the Church's darkest hour, will remain her haven of peace, rest, and unfailing security.

*Only help us, Lord, to live by this, and nothing else.*

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*