

Glorying in the Cross Only

by C.L. Loos

The sermon emphasizes the importance of glorifying in the cross of Christ and condemning false glorying in men, parties, and other objects.

Topics: "The Cross", "Christian Doctrine"

Description

C.L. Loos preaches about the importance of glorying only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, as expressed by Paul in Galatians 6:14. He emphasizes that true Christian joy, strength, and victory come from focusing solely on the Cross, which illuminates the path of Christian doctrine and history. Loos warns against false objects of glorying such as idolizing men, party pride, doctrinal idolatry, and the dangerous influence of Rationalism, urging believers to guard against these common sinful tendencies that lead away from Christ.

Transcript

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world."--GAL. vi: 14.

E have selected this passage, as the thought which it contains, so nobly uttered by Paul, has ever been, and ever will be, a leading one for guidance in the right way--for confidence and joy, for strength and victory, to every true Christian heart. It is a bright torch in our hand, illuminating the path of our studies and contemplations in the field of Christian doctrine and Christian history. It interprets to us the evangelical voices of the prophets; reveals to us the glorious mysteries of our Savior's earthly history, and of the apostolic life and labors; and sends its illuminating beams across centuries and millenniums, to lead men, in every age, to a true understanding of the advancing history of the Church in doctrine and in life.

The strong deprecatory language of the apostle in our text, reveals to us that there are other objects than the Cross in which men glory; that all such glorying is not only "vain," and opposed to the spirit of the Gospel, but in the highest degree fatal to the fidelity and purity, [447] the joy and power, of the individual Christian life in the apostle, and to the work of God in his hand. So we are to understand and accept his words. It is strong, decisive language, most comprehensive, and that can not be misunderstood, uttered from an earnest heart, under the promptings of the Spirit of God. It is one of those great declarations of the apostle that often, in one word, reveal to us the great law of his own and of all Christian life, individual and associate. It stands before us not only as an oracle of the Holy Spirit, and, as such, demanding our acceptance; but, beyond this, it has a special significance and value to us, in revealing the law of life that

controlled Paul as an individual Christian man, and made him what he was, and has been, for all ages, as a monument of the grace of God; a "man of God," rising loftily in his marvelous devotion to Christ, in his life of labor, suffering, and victories for Christ's sake; for he speaks this directly of himself: "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."

The history of such a man is given to us as a rich inheritance, and should ever be to us a special study, that we might not only rejoice in what he was in his wondrous life, but that we also might learn the mystery of such a life. It thus becomes a great demonstration of what the power of God is in the Gospel--that "power of God unto salvation," as he himself has called it--in so marvelously transforming the lion-like, fiercely-persecuting Saul of Tarsus into Paul the Christian apostle, through a long life of unexampled endurance the lion-like hero, in his complete devotion in the Gospel as a "servant of Christ."

With such thoughts, then, we come to meditate upon the declaration of Paul that constitutes our text, looking [448] at it in its double significance, on its negative, and on its positive side; what it forbids and deprecates, and what it rejoices in and commands as the true and chief object of our glorying.

It is our purpose, however, especially to discuss what is embraced in the negative side of these words, what Paul so strongly condemns as it is this condemnation of all false glorying that gives such peculiar force to the declaration, and so strongly arrests our attention. The importance of this part of the study of our text must be evident to the thoughtful Christian mind. The very force of the language suggests it, and the careful tracing out of the field which it covers will fully reveal and justify this force of words. And let us keep steadfastly in mind that Paul's language is most exclusive. It allows no object of "glorying" whatever, in the strong sense which Paul gives to this word here, except the Cross of Christ. His denunciation, therefore--the denunciation of the Holy Spirit--covers all that lies outside of this. What, then, are these false objects of human glorying? To inquire into this shall be the special purpose of this discourse.

A few preliminary reflections are necessary to give the proper designed weight to what we intend to say.

Since man, in his first disobedience, by a direct inspiration of Satan, threw off the supreme and complete dominion of God over him, and conceived the rebellious, fatal thought of being his own master and god--his soul, in its disordered wanderings, has been, for the lack of this sovereign control from on high, the sport of sinful passions, by which, as evil powers, it has been urged on all sides to sin against God, and to work out its own ruin. There have been manifested by the universal implantation of the seeds of disobedience and sin universal tendencies [449] away from God, the central power of all that is true, and good, and blessed, and toward all that is false, evil, and destructive of human happiness. These tendencies of our evil nature--as they are alone the direct offspring of sin, and as "all have sinned"--are as universal as humanity, inherent in our "flesh," and as enduring as the ages of sin on earth. It is of great consequence well to note this truth. Wherever one being is that wears the form of Adam, the sinful, the earthy--that is clothed in the flesh, dwelling on this earth, and so surrounded by the world of sin, these common tendencies to evil will be found as his perpetual attendants. They are neither Asiatic, African, European, nor American; they are Adamic. They belong exclusively, neither to the past, the present, nor the future; they belong to all time. They are limited to no class; and from them no party--whatever its creed, religion, or its philosophy, whatever its attainments in knowledge or life--is free. They are the motions of sin, and will cling to us all, whatever, in any respect, we may be, as long as the liability to sin is with us; as long as "we dwell in houses of clay, and have our habitations in the dust;" as long as that solemn and most significant saying of Christ will be true of us: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is

weak!"--as long as this "burden" of life, of this body and this world, is upon us.

Humiliating as it may be to human pride, yet it is most needful, without ceasing, to impress this truth upon the minds and hearts of men; for such is our proneness to pride and self-righteousness, such our trust in and boast of creed and party perfection, amounting often to idolatry, that we perpetually forget that we, as all others, are yet but men, are yet in the flesh--this sinful flesh; are yet under the motions of sin, and liable to all the frailties and aberrations inherent [450] to our common Adamic nature, and that for the best there is no entire and final release until we are freed from this body. Advancement, indeed, there may be in the mighty conflict with these manifestations and powers of a sinful nature; glorious victories, by the grace of God, may be gained by those who are strong "by faith," with "strength in the Lord and the power of his might" "to overcome the world." But only when the battle of life is ended, and "mortality is swallowed up of life," will the great deliverance come. Especially can this immunity never be the lot of any class or party, however pure and perfect its creed. For whatever eminent attainments and progress in the Divine life individuals here and there may make, and do make, such attainments are never true in a like degree of entire bodies of people, representing every form and class of humanity. For any religious people to claim it, is a foolish and sinful vanity, that reveals an ignorance of the Bible, of the history of humanity in the Church, and especially of themselves. That the pure doctrine of Christ, so rarely understood and accepted, and an earnest, divinely-supported effort to live in conformity to it, gives us the surest and greatest triumphs over all these common evil tendencies of a fallen nature, is a truth so clear, so well accepted, that it need not for a moment be questioned. Purity of doctrine--of creed, if you choose--is to be insisted on for this very reason, with "all diligence," and is not for a moment to be compromised or lightly treated. It is an essential Divine means to salvation from sin. Let this never be overlooked. But--let us repeat it--the purest and fullest conception of Bible truth does not grant to us a perfect freedom from the liability to these evil tendencies, as it does not, and can not, grant us an immunity from sin. "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, [451] and the truth is not in us." This is a solemn saying. This is true of individuals; how much more of whole bodies. Let every Christian man ponder it well.

In direct application, now, to the subject before us, we say that among the most immediate and pernicious of these motions of sin--these evil tendencies--is that which, in direct opposition to God's command, leads us to false objects of "glorying." We use this term in our discussion in the sense in which it is employed by Paul in our text, denoting that to which we give the supreme devotion of our hearts, and which is the highest object of joy and glory to us. If "glorying" be employed in any weaker and more subordinate sense, it is not that which Paul here employs. This declaration of Paul is made particularly and directly in opposition to the Judaizers in the Galatian churches, who "gloried in the flesh." "As many of them as desire to have a fair show in the flesh, compel you to be circumcised, only (for the purpose only) that they might not suffer persecution for the Cross of Christ. For neither the circumcised themselves keep the law, but desire you to be circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. But for me," (and by way of contrast--for such is the literal force of the passage,) "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." Observe well the grand reason which he attaches--the power of the Cross to emancipate him from the dominion of the world.

We look at this question only as it relates to our religious and spiritual life, and as it affects and is illustrated in the Church of Christ. With the history of the question as it lies outside of these limits, we have, at present, nothing to do. [452]

The great significance of the words of Paul in our text is fully verified in the entire history of God's people. The endless aberrations from primitive truth, from the law and spirit of the Gospel, that characterize the

annals of the great apostasy, and are signalized more or less in the records of every seat and party, are largely due to the violations of the great law of Christian life here announced by Paul--to glorying in false objects of devotion, in lesser objects than the Cross of Jesus Christ; so robbing our Lord of the glory due only to him, shutting out our souls from the power of the Cross, and thus perverting and debasing, by this idolatry, our own nature. To us, especially, who are laboring for a repriming of the Church after the pure law and spirit of the New Testament, it is of special moment to study well the character of this prolific source of evils in the Church.

The limits of our discourse allow us to speak only of some of the chief manifestations of this "carnal glorying." We select those that have been most prominently historic, and whose extended evil workings are obvious to all.

"Let no man glory in men," says Paul. Yet to glory in men is a constant tendency of our corrupt nature. We speak not now of this passion of hero-worship outside of the Church, that has made men make demi-gods of their fellows, and has led millions often willingly to subject their souls in base, slavish bondage, to the dominion of their idols. Every-where, among the most enlightened, as among the most degraded, the passion of men for this servile idol-worship is seen. But it were well if such a sinful proneness to idolatry had been limited to the secular world. This could not, however, be expected. It is an Adamic sin, inherent to the human. In the bosom of the Church of Christ we see it also manifested, and that [453] through the entire course of its history. Let us consider it for a moment in its character and evil workings.

In the first place, it is positively prohibited by the Holy Spirit: "Let no man glory in men." To do so, then, is to violate, in a direct and positive way, an express law of God. The Holy Spirit would not so severely and exclusively denounce this sin, were it not a sin, and were its effects not pernicious to the cause of God. These evil effects are manifold. This glorying in man enslaves the minds and souls of men. It clothes the very objects of this hero-worship with perfections not theirs, and hides or sanctifies their defects and errors. It makes men ready willingly to receive as authoritative, the opinions, expositions of doctrine, and spiritual control of their masters, often to the rejection of the highest and most salutary truths. It enchains, with the ipse dixit of the master, the precious liberty with which Christ has endowed his people. This liberty, this glorious gift of God, permits and commands us to push our inquiries, uncontrolled but by the limits of the law of God, onward and onward evermore, into the infinite treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God, and so to satisfy our souls' hungering and thirsting after the light and life, the truth and love, the joys and the glories, of Heaven. But this base idolatry confronts us perpetually with the demands of submission to the law of the master's attainments and opinions, commanding abject homage to these--making these a hitherto, beyond which no man must proudly venture; thus basely seeking to enslave the noblest inspirations and aspirations of the free Christian soul, to which it has been awakened by the freedom with which Christ has made it free, to the finite, the human, when it should bow to the infinite, the unerring Divine alone. This erring human, beset as it is, in every possible case, with [454] weaknesses, prejudices, and errors, even in the highest examples of wisdom, of knowledge, and piety, can never, must never, be allowed to control this lofty freedom of the Christian soul--a freedom, the glorious consciousness of which is a supreme joy that the slave can never feel, and gives the soul unwonted strength that he can never know. It bears it upward, as upon wings, in the consciousness of right, and of a sublime energy to ascend in the pathway of truth. This grand highway of the Bible, opened to man, to lead him ever onward, and ever upward, to the throne of the Eternal, must not be obstructed by human idols, made so by foolish men.

Such false homage to the human debases the soul. The freest and fullest development of all that is great and good, pure and lofty, in man, is possible only where the fullest freedom, limited only by the sovereign law of God, is found. But to subject the soul to the human, cripples it in its strength, cultivates narrow-mindedness, prejudice, and the love of ignorance. It also inspires a spirit of wicked tyranny; for none are such tyrants as those who are willing and degraded slaves themselves. To see this, look but for a moment at the soul-and-mind-emasculated Catholic, monkish devotee, who, in dark and vacant spirit, crouches before his superior, in the abjectness of his slavery, spiritless as a corpse--and there is a tool of tyranny, fearful and terrible, as he is ignorant and degraded.

There is another evil effect that this "glorying in men" but seldom fails to produce on the objects themselves of this servility. In spite of all the better promptings of wisdom and true piety, this perpetual praise and adulation, this constant incense-burning and submission before them, will often beget in them an extravagant, false notion of their wisdom, their knowledge, power, and [455] authority. It makes them, in the end, expect, and not seldom demand, the homage as a right which they have so long been accustomed to receive. It is a dangerous and evil thing to make men taste the power of authority, so sweet to our unfortunate nature. Be not surprised at this. We are all but men; and as a habitual life of slavery generally ends in making really a slave out of a man, so also, in like manner, a long-enjoyed, easily-yielded homage and dominion, finally begets the love and assertion of it.

Finally, this "carnal glorying in men"--an error undying as sin, with millenniums on its brow--is yet vigorous for evil, in its Protean shapes, to-day as of old! It would have made the Nazarene prophet a king, from the falsest of motives, entirely ignorant and regardless of his real character as the true Messiah. It made fierce assaults on the infant Church in the very day of the apostles, and with the most specious pretenses. One gloried in Paul, another in Cephas, another in Apollos. It has made man, from age to age, in servile abeyance to the tyrannous behests of this passion of slavery, subdue in his own heart, and attempt to subdue in the hearts of others, the best convictions of truth that, in a loud voice, demanded utterance for God and humanity. It is a prolific fountain of injustice to men often the purest and the best, and is the origin of strifes and ugly-hearted factions. It often fastens the chains of mental and spiritual slavery on generations; and, above all, turns men away from Christ, to "worship the creature rather than the Creator!"

Man must bow to God alone! How the soul, that hungers and thirsts after God and his truth, revolts at these base attempts of weak man to fetter it in its progress to a fuller knowledge, and to higher enjoyments of the blessed Gospel of Christ!--these attempts to awe into [456] silence and slavish, creeping fear and submission, free and noble spirits, by the idolatrous, tyrannous utterance of other names than God and his Christ! Let the soul be early taught and disciplined--especially in all that concerns its religious life, in all that concerns its relations to God--to bow in deepest homage and submission only to the Divine--never to the human! And when foolish man is disposed thus basely to bow to the human, even in its highest perfections, say to him: "See thou do it not! These are but thy fellow-servants. Bow to God only."

It is the voice of the Holy Spirit, in the Word of God and in the heart of every regenerate man, to thank God for the men who have been, in every age, his true chosen servants; to esteem them highly for their works' sake, and to seek to emulate their eminent examples. He that is most enlightened by the law and Spirit of Christ, and who has drunk deepest into the inspirations of the words of Paul in our text, will feel this most, and do the best. Above all others, will he rejoice at those great men of God, who, foremost in the ranks of God's people, "have fought the good fight" against a gainsaying, apostate generation; and who have boldly taught and defended the truth of the Gospel; called men back to the pure doctrine and life of the

New Testament; and who will, in the eternal world, "shine as the stars forever and forever." All this it is our joy and our duty to do. But to place our souls in bondage to their words; to "glory" in them; to do homage to them, with a glorying and a homage due only to Christ the Crucified, is slavery, idolatry, and sin.

Another form of false devotion, which is also one of these common tendencies of our sinful nature, is to glory in party. This sea devotion, this selfish party pride and bigotry, is one of the rifest vices all over Christendom [457] and deserves to be especially noted in its evil influences. It keeps our eyes blinded to our own defects, in doctrine, faith, and life. "Our views, our faith, our conduct," as a party, must be justified, as they now are. No man must raise even a doubt, or suggest any improvement or progress. If any one among us does not so "glory," and burn perpetual incense, as we do, to this party idolatry, let him be marked as false, and be denounced at once; shake the party lash over him; conjure up before him the fearful phantoms of party vengeance. This evil spirit dooms a people to narrowness, stuntedness, weakness--to all the fatal effects of mental and spiritual slavery. And among every people there are always, in abundance, these devotees to mere party, and they are always among the greatest human enemies religion has. It requires the least mind, the least intelligence, piety, and goodness, to be such a poor sectary.

It prevents us from looking in the proper light at our fellow-beings. We can not, with this bad spirit, do justice to them. It fills us with the evil passions of jealousy and hate toward men that "are not of us," and makes us commit endless wrongs against them, and to sin against God, and against the Spirit of the Gospel. It makes men indifferent to the means adopted to advance the party. The mere sectary glories in numbers, in numerical predominance, in ecclesiastical, triumphant superiority; and, as the motive and the end are purely carnal, so the means adopted must necessarily be chiefly so. All is justified that advances "our Church;" all is denounced that opposes it. It is not a chief matter to the sectary to have souls converted to Christ, saved, and purified, redeemed from the world, and fitted for heaven. His highest aim and glory is in the outward triumph of seeing men join his Church. All [458] his ambition is utterly carnal. Yet all this time this poor, blinded victim of this carnal passion imagines that he is fighting for God, and "for the faith once delivered to the saints;" and it is often beyond the power of God and man to make him see his error.

But, above all, it keeps us from Christ, and makes us sin against him; for, this false object of our pride, this evil spirit toward mankind which it inspires, this blindness to our own defects and sins, and the general self-righteousness it begets and nourishes--all prevent us from knowing and feeling the need, the object, the power and blessings of the Cross of Christ, which ever reveals to us our own imperfections and sinfulness, calls us to love God and man, and teaches us that a "new creature" alone avails before God.

The devotion to Christ and his Cross, expressed in the text, alone will save us from this debased form of idolatrous glorying. Let us beware of this fatal error, so delusive in appearance, but whose real form and life have ever been so ugly and repulsive, and whose ripe fruits so destructive to the true interests of the cause of Christ. Wide and fearful has been its power over the souls of men, and very stubborn its life and endurance. And let us remember--and this especially for our own sakes, that it is a human, Adamic sin, having its origin and home in our common nature; and, therefore, let us be wisely and jealously on our guard, lest we also be tempted and led away after the same manner of sin.

We must not mistake this unhallowed party bigotry for the pure love and devotion due from every true Christian to his brethren and the Church and cause of Christ. The partisan glories only in external prosperity; but the true child of God in that which is real, the spiritual prosperity [459] of the Church. His

great joy is to lead men to Christ, to see his brethren become daily wiser and better, "growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." To this end he prays and labors that they may see their imperfections and sins; that these may be remedied and put away, and the Church put on her beautiful garments of truth, holiness, and love, and, in the strength of the Lord, go forth to conquer, "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

Again: let not an ill-natured, hateful, carping fault-finding, that is devoid of all love and hope, and of all attachment to God's people; an all-despising, evil-speaking against the Church, be mistaken for a pure purpose to see and correct the errors in our midst, that God may be glorified among us. Paul, however clear his eye, and ready and bold his voice, to see, rebuke, and correct the defects and sins of the brethren and churches, yet always revealed the fidelity and nobility of his heart in a generous appreciation and love of God's people. This we demand in every man among us; and the censor that does not show these noble qualities must expect a just and prompt rejection of his censorship.

Another common evil tendency is to glory in doctrines. This very ready error is to be found boldly on the surface every-where throughout the whole history of the Church. It is, indeed, one of the most common of the unfortunate aberrations of the human mind manifested in Christian history. Men very early, in the first years of the Church, began to grow in very devoted love with favorite doctrines, and mistook thus, altogether, the true object proposed in our religion, of our faith and our love, our trust, joy, and glorying.

It is substituting the means and the statement of [460] the object, for the final object itself to be reached by these means. This tendency shot into revolting, desolating maturity in one form in ancient Gnosticism. It makes men single out some doctrine or dogma as the object of their blind, idolatrous adoration and apostate glorying. We truly call it idolatry and apostasy; for men's hearts, by it, stray away from Him as the only true object of our devotion. It makes the heart vain, intolerant, and impious.

How often do we see men rudely, and almost impiously, carry on a carnal warfare among men, not out of love to Christ and humanity, not glorying and rejoicing, like Paul, in a crucified Redeemer, but in a doctrine, having nothing but this doctrine and its triumphs in their eyes and hearts. These men only aim to convert men to their doctrines, and not to Christ. With them the favorite doctrine, and not Christ, is the first and the last, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end; that which was, and is, and is to come for evermore.

The salvation of souls, the rescuing of men from sin, as brands from the eternal burning; the preparing of the spirits of men for the eternal holiness of heaven; the love of God and men in Christ, that "constrains" men to the glorious work of the Gospel--all these are things to which these doctrine-idolaters are strangers. Therefore, also, it is not seldom the case that when their glorying in doctrines has burnt out its earth-born flame, their faith, their joy, and hopes are at an end, and their devotion and labors are over.

With the novelty of the doctrine, which was their only source of life and inspiration, their zeal, too, passed away. That deep, exhaustless fountain of everlasting life and power which is found only in Christ, they knew not, and had never drunk from. Such men are those mere creed-devotees, who often, for their creeds, written or unwritten, long or short, will hate and lie, [461] calumniate and scandalize, crucify and burn, all the time far away from Christ, his truth and his love.

See, for example, those two men in the pulpit, in discussion. Observe in their eyes, and on their lips, the play of every carnal passion; note the low trickeries, the vulgar legerdemain, the shallow and dishonorable fallacies, the unmanly insinuations against each other, the debasing appeals to party prejudices and

hatreds--all so gross and revolting that the generous soul turns away with loathing and sorrow. And what, think you, are these two gladiators debating about? Do not be startled; they are vigorously discussing the question, How the Holy Spirit operates in the conversion and sanctification of men! and both these valiant doctrine-defenders utter strangers to the Spirit of God and its blessed influence!

Doctrines do not save us; we are saved by Christ. Doctrines do not cleanse us from our sins; it is the efficacious blood of Christ. We are not converted to doctrines, but to God. We do not believe in doctrines, but in Christ. We are not baptized into them, but into Christ. We do not hope in them, trust in them, glory in them, but in Christ Jesus the Lord.

He that makes a doctrine the object and end of his glorying errs, whether that doctrine be true or false. But it is the testimony of all experience, and a logical result, that such glorying soon perverts and corrupts a true doctrine into a false one. We say, Give up not one jot or tittle of heaven's holy truth. Contend earnestly for it. Make ever a broad, impassable distinction between the truths of the Bible and human errors. But remember, all these Divine lights are only designed to illuminate your pathway to Christ and his Cross; they are but the Divine forces to bring you to him. Reserve the worship and [462] glorying of your redeemed, joyful soul for him alone, as the End of all. Rest not with the doctrine; bow not before it. Never stand still till you have arrived at the feet of Jesus on the Cross; and thence, by the power of the Cross, press forward to the eternal throne of Him who is the "King of kings and Lord of lords."

And there is yet another prominent form of this carnal glorying, another one of these common tendencies of a sinful nature, and than which none is more fatal to the spiritual life in the individual Christian man, or to the general cause of Christ on earth. It is that which glories in human reason; that "enemy of Christ and all righteousness," denominated, in modern days, Rationalism. It sets up in Religion, in the Bible, and in the Church, human reason as the sovereign monarch, as the human idol before whom all must bow, "of things in heaven, in the earth, and under the earth," of things in time and in eternity. Proudly it has sought to enthrone itself in the temple of God, showing itself that it is God." (2 Thess. ii: 4.) Before its sovereign dictates and decisions all things must give way. In the interpretation of the Word of God, all things that are not in harmony with its carnal wisdom must be branded as false, and blotted out. Nothing so sacred, nothing so awfully Divine, nothing so direct and plain in the words of the Holy Spirit, that its impious, destructive criticism, its proud human judgment can not degrade, dishonor, and rob of all its sacredness, its Divine power, and drag down to its own low conceptions of truth and reasonableness. It is, by way of pre-eminence, the power of impiety. It is, historically, in the directest manner, of Satanic origin, having the spirit of the pride of the fallen archangel as its essential life. It was the inspiration and burden of the first temptation. "God alone is not the [463] supreme, sovereign judge of right-and wrong, of 'good and evil.' You yourselves, as men, have within yourselves this sovereign wisdom. You yourselves, as men, can 'be as gods,' knowing good and evil; and what God has said, you must interpret in harmony with your reason, and the dictates of your lusts, even if it be to the exact inversion of his words." Such was the burden of the tempter's words, and such has ever been, in essence, in spirit, and often in exact form, the voice of this Rationalism.

Its voice is that of the siren, flattering to the easily-deluded ear of man. Its approaching step is covert and stealthy, as of the serpent, its prototype in Eden. Its purpose is concealed, but deadly. The fruit it offers to human taste is "fair to behold," and pleasant to the carnal, sinful appetite. Woe to him that heeds not the voice of warning; that makes not God, and his direct word, in its plain, obvious meaning, his defense, as did Christ in his temptation! Woe to him who, with evil lust, tastes of the fatal fruit! It will turn to gall and wormwood within him, and kill off the life of Christ in his soul.

Of the terribly destructive history of Rationalism within the last century it is not our purpose here to speak. It is not necessary. This history is now read, and known, and acknowledged of all men. We stop only to note, as precisely in place here, one important and most significant fact in the history of Rationalism. And that is, its fierce enmity to the Cross of Christ. This has been the special point of its most violent and most incessant attacks. All that characterizes the Cross; all that belongs to its history and significance--the hopeless sinfulness and depravity of man; the perfect Godhood of Jesus Christ; the true character of sin; the Biblical doctrine of the motive and of the necessity and purpose of the atonement;--all this, that together [464] constitutes the doctrine of the Cross, and alone gives it its meaning and power, has been, and is now, the object of especial offense to the spirit of Rationalism. As it was to the Jews and to the Greeks of old, an offense and a foolishness, so it is to this spirit of proud glorying in human reason to-day. Nothing in all the history of the Church, not the Pope himself, has set itself more proudly in opposition to God and his Word, in the very bosom of the Church itself, than this proud idolatry of Reason. But as of old, so now Paul would say, that "What to it, and to them that perish, is a stumbling-stone and foolishness, is to him, and to all that truly believe and are saved, the power of God and the wisdom of God." And what they despise, is to him the one chief object of glorying.

But will our denouncing these errors be a sufficient guarantee against our falling into them? By no means. It is the singular blindness that accompanies these common errors that they often who are loudest in their denunciation, are the first to run the deepest into them. So the apostle speaks of those boasting of and promising liberty, who are themselves, all the while, the meanest slaves of the basest passions. The Quaker, while solemnly denouncing the vanity and obsolescence of all external forms, is, for generations, notoriously and servilely in bondage to the very cut and color of his garments, the shape of his hat, and the obsolete forms of his speech, so that he can be easily discerned, even from afar, by his "outward appearance." The deluded or depraved victims of the spiritualism of our land and of our day, have, long since, demonstrated to all that their pretension to the spiritual is only an excuse and a cloak for a swifter and more immediate descent to the vilest carnality. And so in other cases innumerable. [465]

Mistaking the denunciation of an error for freedom from it, is one of the most every-day facts and follies of human life. Let us not forget this. The closest and most candid self-scrutinizing; the most earnest and constant appeals for Divine aid; and the fullest acceptation and realization in all our soul of the words of our text, accompanied by a never-ceasing watchfulness over ourselves, alone will save us from these and other like fatal errors.

Christ alone is the light and life of men; therefore, to them to whom he is not, as in our text, symbolically represented, the only source of light and life in religion, this religion is only a cold world of darkness and death. Falsest of false, a vanity of vanities, a bitterest deception, that blots out the celestial glories, and tears out the life-giving, life-disseminating heart of the Gospel of our redemption--is every pretense of Christianity, however fair its voice and carnally attractive its form, in which Christ the crucified is not the sole joy, strength, and glory, the beginning and the end, the first and the last!

And let us not be misunderstood as to what we mean by "the Cross," by "Christ the crucified;" for here again, as every-where else, fatal errors are made. Do we mean by it only, or chiefly, a noble example of life and death given to humanity; one who, by his pure life, his teaching of sublime, heavenly wisdom, and his martyr sufferings, is worthy of the highest admiration, the most ardent love, and the most generous emulation of men, and that saves men by his example of life and death, and the inspirations it affords? Is this the sum and burden of our joy, our glorying, and our hope? No! a thousand times, no! None of these cheating acceptations of Christ, that rob him of his chief glory, and us of our chief joy and hope--is what

Paul means, and what we rejoice in, though never so [466] beautifully and delusively expressed. It is Christ the crucified, as the God-man, the Savior of men, "the Lamb slain from the beginning," who shed his atoning, expiating, sacrificial blood for the sins of the world, as the only price that purchased our redemption, and thus to man the only hope in life and death. With the proud, Christ-degrading negations of Unitarianism, in every possible shape and form, from that highest type of ancient Arianism to that lowest of modern Socinianism, the words of Paul, in our text, and our acceptance of it as our joy and confidence in its teaching and spirit, are forever utterly irreconcilable.

Let this Divine and blessed Redeemer--as we see him and hear him on earth, "going about every-where doing good," by his heavenly teaching and his heavenly works of love and power; as we behold him on the Cross, suffering for a sinful world; and as we see him in heaven triumphant--ever be our only joy, honor, strength, and hope, our exceeding great reward, our present and everlasting glory. And may this holy and single devotion to him, filling all our soul, be the star of our life, to guide us, finally, to his own eternal dwelling-place in the Father's presence, "where there is fullness of joy, and to his right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore."

"God forbid that our souls should ever glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which alone the world is crucified to us, and we to the world!" Amen. [467]

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