

What the Recent SCOTUS Decision Says About How We View the Cross

Happy 243rd birthday, America. You've changed a lot in those 243 years. In some ways for the better. In other ways, not so much. But one of the most significant changes is in how the cross is perceived in our culture.

For centuries, the cross has been an undeniable symbol of Christianity. It represents the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. People who identify as Christians erect crosses on church buildings and in cemeteries. They wear crosses around their neck as jewelry.

So it's not surprising that those hostile to the cross of Jesus Christ want it removed from public places. What *is* surprising—and sad—is the rationale for the recent Supreme Court decision. And many Christians are cheering the decision without realizing the danger of the underpinning argument.

The American Humanist Association (AHA) had asked the Supreme Court to require removal of a 40-foot tall, concrete cross in Bladensburg, Maryland. The cross was originally a private venture to honor local men who died in World War I. The AHA protested the cross's presence because it is located by a public highway and maintained by a government agency.

The Supreme Court rejected the claim that this was an unconstitutional endorsement of religion. But here's the court said this cross was essentially historic, not religious.

Justice Alito did say, "The cross is undoubtedly a Christian symbol, but that fact should not blind us to everything else that the Bladensburg cross has come to represent." He added, "The image of a simple white cross developed into a cultural

symbol of the conflict. ... The adoption of the cross as the Bladensburg memorial must be seen in that historical context.”

They permitted the cross to remain because it was cultural and historical rather than just religious. Let that sink in for a moment.

Judge Alito’s decision did note, “Its removal or radical alteration at this date would be seen by many not as a neutral act but as the manifestation of a hostility toward religion.”

Well, at least we have that. Please don’t misunderstand me. I’m thankful for the supportive court decision. Yet I’m torn because of the apparently diluted meaning of the cross of Christ.

Sadly, this is the culmination of decades of nominal Christians going through the motions of religious activity without any heart change. Wearing cross jewelry because it’s fashionable or socially acceptable, yet devoid of association with the substitutionary death of our Redeemer.

Today, many people identify as Christian by default. Because their parents are Christian. Or because they go to church twice a year, on Christmas and Easter. Or because they’re not Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim, yet they still have a general belief in God.

The power of God’s Word, His redeeming work through Jesus Christ and His ongoing work in believers through the indwelling Holy Spirit all seem to get lost in the default choice. People check one box because the others don’t quite fit. It’s no wonder the meaning of the cross is leaning more and more toward a cultural and historical context than a religious one.

Am I glad the Bladensburg cross is allowed to stand? Absolutely. But I’m also sad that it’s allowed to stand while being slowly and inexorably stripped of its essential meaning.

When you see or wear a cross, is your understanding of it filtered through a cultural perspective or a biblical one? If it's just cultural, you're missing out on both the central meaning of the cross and the one true God it points to.

What does the cross mean to you? {eoa}

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