

## **ALIVE TO GOD: ‘YOU HAVE DIED’**

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:19–20).

What does it mean to you to say, ‘I have been crucified with Christ’? Missionary candidate: could not easily say. L. E. Maxwell *Born Crucified* Oliphants, London 1958, p. 7:

A missionary from Africa recently said to us: ‘If only all our missionaries had this teaching, it would be the solution of many of our difficulties on the field’.

We may have some difficulties on the field here for lack of this teaching. There may be those of us who think we can be Christians without ever having been crucified with Christ. Paul:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him (2 Tim. 2:11).

Not otherwise.

So what did it mean for Paul to say: ‘I have been crucified with Christ’? For him, it had to do with the law of God:

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ.

It was a death he died through the law. Before he was met by Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul thought he had kept the whole law of God:

as to righteousness under the law, blameless (Phil. 3:6).

After he was met by Christ, it was a very different story. Then he knew himself to be ‘a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence’—‘the foremost’ of sinners (1 Tim. 1:13, 16). Then he knew that the law of God, that he had thought he was keeping so well, actually condemned him to death. His horrible sin, through the good and holy law of God, killed him dead (see Rom. 7:9–13). From that point of view, Paul calls this law of God ‘the law of sin and death’ (Rom. 8:2)—and so it is for any who have broken it, or who think that by trying to keep it they can prove themselves righteous before God.

When did this realisation happen to Paul? When he saw Jesus, in all his risen glory, on the road to Damascus. Jesus, whom Paul had thought no better than a condemned criminal, whose name and followers he was trying to stamp out, Paul now found to be God’s holy Messiah all along! Yet he had died—why? Obviously not for any wrong Jesus had done. Then on whose account had Jesus died? It came to Paul in a flash: Paul was the condemned sinner—Jesus had died the death that was due to Paul: ‘Christ . . . the Son of God . . . loved me and gave himself for me’.

Now this is often taken to mean: Jesus died instead of me—he took the punishment for my sins—so now I do not have to die eternally, and praise God for that—I am free! Free from the law’s condemnation, free from the guilt of my sin, free from the sentence of death. All of that is true, as far as it goes. All sorts of nice little stories are told of people who have substituted themselves or given their lives for another in a dangerous situation, or those who have taken someone else’s punishment, to illustrate what Jesus did and convince us that it was for us, and to show us how grateful we should feel. These stories contain truth, and have been powerfully used of God to bring people to faith in Christ. But, deep down, I don’t think our consciences are finally satisfied by that. It’s all very well having someone else die for you,

but we are the ones who sinned. We are the ones who needed to die. Just having someone die for us does not change that. There's something still not right, something still unfinished, about Jesus having died for us while we are still walking around alive and scot-free—when we are the ones who should have died.

I would go so far as to say that if Jesus died on that cross and we did not, then we are still walking about as unregenerate sinners, alienated from the life of God.

So talking of Jesus as our substitute, or even as our representative, only goes so far. A substitute does something *instead* of us—but that means that it happens to the substitute and not to us, so we are still out of it. A representative does something *for* us—Ian Thorpe wins a swimming race and gets a gold medal for Australia and they play our national anthem—but we know jolly well that we were not in the water there and swimming that fast—we were sitting back watching it on television! People's faith in Jesus can be a bit like that: God had this problem with our sin, so He sorted it out by sending His Son to die for us, so that cleared all that up, and now we can get on with it. It's all at one remove—it happened out there somewhere and, even though it was for us, we were not directly involved. And so it is possible for us to remain untouched by that—and unchanged, basically the same as we were before. Except that we may have some thought processes by which we are convinced that it was done for us, and that we should be grateful. But Paul did not just say, 'Christ . . . the Son of God . . . loved me and gave himself for me'. He also said, 'I have been crucified with Christ'. Paul himself died that terrible death there with Jesus—and rightly so. The sentence of death that the law of God rightly requires—despite, and even because of, all Paul's attempts to keep and uphold the law of God in his own self-righteousness—that sentence of death that Paul deserved was passed against Paul there, and Paul was justly executed there—in Christ. Paul was not only condemned to death: the death sentence was actually carried out—the corpse was examined, Paul was pronounced dead, and the death certificate was signed.

You see, the problem with all those little stories about people taking someone's punishment or giving their lives for someone else is that they do not come anywhere near what was happening here on the cross. What Jesus did there was unlike anything that has ever happened, or could ever happen, before or since. We have nothing to compare it with. Our love goes only so far. We can give ourselves to another person, and we can give ourselves for another person, but we can never in love so identify with them that we *become* that person in whatever that person is going through or needs to go through. Yet that is what Christ did there. 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross' (1 Pet. 2:24). Peter does not say he bore the punishment for our sins. He says he bore our sins. It is impossible to separate sins from the person who has done them. We carry them with us and in us, as part of ourselves, with all their terrible guilt and shame and confusion and burden and grief and pain and hardness of heart. Jesus carried them in his body to the cross. He became us. God 'made him to be sin who knew no sin' for our sake (2 Cor. 5:21); 'by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, [God] condemned sin in the flesh' (Rom. 8:3)—in our flesh, that he had taken on as his. Christ became 'a curse for us' (Gal. 3:13).

We have nothing to compare that with. The nearest we come to it is in the Old Testament sacrifices, where you took one of your best animals, and you brought it to the priest at the temple, and you laid your hand on it, to say: 'This animal is me, and I am this animal'. Then you saw its throat cut, and the blood flowed, and the animal was sliced up and placed on the burning altar, and you saw yourself there go up in flames. Except that 'it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins' (Heb. 10:4)—you are still standing there, when you are the one who should have died. But now 'a single sacrifice for sins' (Heb. 10:12) has been made—Jesus' death is spoken of in this way. Jesus has come and said: 'I am you, and you are me'. Christ through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God' (Heb.

9:14); and ‘the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all’ (Isa. 53:6)—and ‘by God’s will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all’ (Heb. 10:10), such that what Jesus said is now true of us: ‘anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life’ (John 5:24). ‘For’, as Paul says, ‘whoever has died is justified from sin’ (Rom. 6:7; literal translation).

So Paul said: ‘I have been crucified with Christ’. Don’t try and work out how that might be so. Don’t try to explain it or illustrate it. Don’t philosophise about it. Believe that this is so—this is what God has done with you in Christ.

Not just with you, but with the whole human race. This is what Paul also said:

the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died.

Where does he get that from? Jesus said:

Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself (John 12:31–32).

Some commentators say that ‘all people’ means all those who will later believe and be saved. But Jesus here is talking about ‘the judgment of this world’. The condemnation to death by God of every guilty sinner in the world is what Jesus is taking himself into, and that will include everyone, whether they later repent and believe and are saved or not. Jesus is talking about an action by which ‘the ruler of this world [by which he means Satan] will be driven out’. When all of us sinners have been purged of our sin in that judgment of the cross, and our guilt removed, then Satan will have nothing any more to accuse us of, and any power he has over us will be broken. Christ is the one who has entered ‘the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone . . . so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death’ (Heb. 2:9, 14–15)—which is the fear of accusation and judgment which, for us in Christ, is now past. Some commentators say that Jesus being ‘lifted up from the earth’ has a reference to Jesus’ rising from death and being exalted in the heavens, and that people will be drawn to Jesus in that. However true that may be, John is very specific as to what Jesus meant by being ‘lifted up’:

He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die (John 12:33).

The drawing of all people to himself was in the cross—into that judgment of the world and that driving-out of Satan—and it is this ‘love of Christ’, by which he totally identified with us so as to become us in that judgment, with us there in him—‘one has died for all; therefore all have died’—this love now constrains us, who have been thus reconciled to God in Christ, to ‘persuade others’ and take the message of this reconciliation to the world (see 2 Cor. 5:11–21).

There is no way around that judgment. There is no other way of belonging to Christ. Only if we have died with him, will we also live with him (see 2 Tim. 2:11). Jesus said before his death:

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me (Mark 8:34).

Jesus was not using the cross as a metaphor for daily sufferings and hard times in life. All his hearers knew what it meant to take up a cross: it meant to be on your way to execution—to be

crucified with Christ. And if Jesus said, as Luke records it, ‘let them . . . take up their cross daily’ (Luke 9:23), then he meant that this reality of having been crucified with Christ is to be lived in every day. There is no way we can preserve ourselves from this—as Jesus said:

those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it (Mark 8:35).

He was not just talking about ‘the noble army of martyrs’—he was talking about every Christian believer crucified with Christ through the action of the cross and the gospel that announces it.

Now, if we were to ask, ‘When were we crucified with Christ?’ there are a number of different ways that could be answered.

In the intention of God we were crucified with Christ before the foundation of the world. Christ ‘was destined before the foundation of the world’ as ‘a lamb without defect or blemish’, whose ‘precious blood’ would be poured out (1 Pet. 1:19–20); and we who believe in Christ are among those whose names have ‘been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered’ (Rev. 13:8).

We have already seen that we were drawn into Christ by his identificatory love for us when he was ‘lifted up from the earth’ on the cross. The day he died was the day we died in him.

We also know that Paul knew he was ‘crucified with Christ’ when he came to live ‘by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal. 2:19–20)—when he believed and was saved.

That was also the time when Paul was baptised and had his sins washed away, calling on the name of Jesus (see Acts 22:16). Paul particularly sees baptism as our association with the death of Jesus:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3–4).

Note that this is not some special teaching or anything new: Paul fully expects believers whom he has not met to know as a matter of course that they began their Christian life dead and buried in Christ. Paul did not say this just to the Romans; he said it to the Colossians as well:

you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead (Col. 2:12).

Paul also says that, as we know this now by faith, we will know the full implications of what it means for us to have been put to death and raised up in Christ when Christ is revealed in glory at the end-time:

you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory (Col. 3:3–4).

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (Rom. 6:5).

So does that answer the question as to when we were crucified with Christ? Just about from before the beginning to after the end, covering the whole human race! As I said, this is one thing no one can escape.

So do we just believe that we have been crucified with Christ, and that's it? Something as all encompassing as that could scarcely go unnoticed in our experience. The realisation itself that we have been crucified with Christ, or that we needed to be, is a shattering one. We have seen it in Paul—it left him blinded, and unable to eat or drink, for three days (see Acts 9:9). We are told that when Isaiah in the temple 'saw the Lord . . . high and lifted up', what he saw was the glory of Christ (see John 12:41). What did that do to him?

I said: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!' (Isa. 6:5).

What came to Peter, when Jesus blessed him with two boatloads of fish?

when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord' (Luke 5:8).

What about the thief, the violent robber, who was hanging on the cross beside Jesus? He uncharacteristically accepted his own condemnation and death as justly deserved, in the light of Jesus' righteous innocence:

Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong . . . Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom (Luke 23:40–42).

I believe something like that must come to each one of us—probably in more ways than one. One way it came to me was when I was preaching on the opening verses of Romans 6. One Sunday I had preached a good philosophical sermon on the interconnectedness of the whole human race, to explain how it was possible that when Jesus died we, in some sense, died with him. But, in the week that followed, the passage would not let me rest with that. I had to come back to it. And I suddenly saw what I had not seen before: that Paul is talking about this 'body of sin' (Rom. 6:6), that had to be destroyed; this 'body of death', from which I need to be delivered—this body in which I have rebelled against God, that is now riddled with sin and death—no way could I take that into the presence of the holy God; no way would I want to! Thank God that it has been disposed of in the death of Christ, and no longer has any lasting reality.

What follows from that? Let us look first at why Paul says we needed to die:

I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God (Gal. 2:19).

Living to God was the one thing he had not been doing—he had been living to himself. That is why he himself needed to die.

For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them

To live no longer to ourselves, but to be alive to God, to live to God. That is what we have been made for. What we were not doing—why we needed to die and come alive in Christ.

And Paul enumerates a number of things that we died to when we were crucified with Christ. We died to the flesh, we died to sin, we died to the law, we died to the devil and all his hosts, we died to the idols, we died to the world.

## Firstly, we died to the flesh:

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:24)

One thing that means is that we have no illusions about ourselves and our own virtue, anymore. We have been shown that we have no such thing as an independent sinful existence apart from God. The ground has been cut out from under our feet. We do not have a leg to stand on. **We have been crucified with Christ, our flesh.** We know we can never trust ourselves again—nor do we need to. Our life is not our own any longer—we now belong to another. **The way Martin Luther put it in effect was ‘mistrust even your good works and fear God with regard to them’.** Because if you’re trusting in them, it’s likely that they are mortal sins.

We died to sin. Paul says in Romans 6: ‘We know that our old self was crucified with Him’. Now the Greek there is ‘anthropos’, our ‘old man’, the ‘old Adam’, the ‘old humanity’. It’s not just saying that we have a kind of ‘bad self’ and a ‘good self’ and the bad self’s died so the good self . . . and the bad self comes up every now and again and we’ve got to clonk it on the head so the good self can come . . . no, he’s talking about the whole mass of humanity here:

We know that our old self [man, Adam] was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. **He doesn't say sin is dead to you. Sin is going to try to be very vital to you. But, you are dead to it. Have no relationship with it, it has no power over you. You're alive to God.** Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, **see what makes the difference? Back to that, all the time.** And present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:6–14). **You are no longer under the law of sin and death, the law that condemns the sinners who have broken and defiled the holy law of God. You are now in the law of grace, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus which is still the holy law of God. But the law of his saving operation.**

So begins the whole passage:

How can we who died to sin go on living in it? (Rom. 6:2)

There’s a story I’ve told before of a Lutheran believer who was going with some friends along the road and they came to an R rated cinema (so called, Adult cinema) Someone said, ‘Let’s go in here’. And he said, ‘I can’t go in there! I’m baptized!’

How can we who have died to sin go on living in it? That’s how it is.

But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness (Rom. 8:10).

Paul says we are dead to the law, we died to the law. I think his experience of trying to live to the law was to have the law as that which justified him over against God and enabled him as some kind of independent entity perhaps to live at one removed from God but still proving to God that I’m doing everything right, when all the time you are really an horrendous sinner and God is holding out to you the gift of salvation and your refusal of that is a greater sin than all the others.

Another quote of Luther’s is that ‘Faith fulfils what the law demands’, or requires or offers.

The law (living at one remove, to justify oneself over against God):

Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only during that person's lifetime? Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress. **Now we could tie ourselves in all sorts of knots trying to get each of those bits and fit them to what he is about to say, but the principle of what he is saying is, when a death occurs, it breaks the nexus of the law for those who are under it, or who are tied to it, or who are trying to live to it, as if that is what gave them their sense of purpose in life, that's what they were married to.** In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit (Rom. 7:1–6).

**That's what we are bonded to, now.**

The devil and all his hosts: **the powers that be that people are always trying to tap into or seek out for their own strength, what ever operates the universe—if we can find that out—'the force' or whatever, we could tap into that, and we could be free and we could have power.**

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? . . .

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, **Look to God, don't try and seek out the 'which's' and the 'wherefore's', the 'why's' and the 'wherefore's' for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.**

**And with that, we died to** The idols, and all that goes with them:

Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). **But you're putting those things to death in a sense in your own life because you have been crucified to them. You couldn't put them to death if you were still bound to them, because they were the very things that were controlling you before over which you had no power.** On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient . . .

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience (Col. 2:20–3:6, 12). **All the things of Christ come from God.**

The world:

May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! (Gal. 6:14–15). **What God has done in Christ.**

**So you have died. Your life is hid with Christ in God. You have died to the flesh, you have died to sin, you have died to the law, you have died to the evil powers. You have died to the world and to the idols. So you live as if we still belong there when the *source* of our life is God, in Christ Jesus. Directly.**

So Jesus said.

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. **What he was saying there was that this is when you will see the true glory of the eternal God. And how are we to comprehend that as it will open out to us in eternity. Is that why the Lamb was destined to be slain from before the foundation of the world? But in his image,** Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life (John 12:23–25).

Nothing else for it. **Nothing else on earth that can evade that. This Is the way of life in our God.**

Let us pray:

‘Father we thank you that you speak your word into our minds which we have configured to hear anything else but that word, and which even as we hear the word we may seek to twist it and try to conform it to our own designs. But Father, your word is your word, it is like the lion on the road that cannot be moved out of the way but whom we must face which must kill us that we may truly live. Father we thank you for your great mercy to us in Christ and as you have rescued us in Him, keep us fruitful, dear Father, in living from you.

Amen.