

# ALIVE TO GOD: CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

## Study Twelve

### YOU HAVE DIED: TO THE WORLD

We are considering all the elements that the New Testament speaks of in connection with our having been crucified with Christ. So far we have looked at what it means to have died to self, sin, the flesh, and the law. In each of these we have found that what we have come alive to in Christ has far outweighed that to which we have died. Finally we come to what it means to have died to the world. Once again we will find that what we come alive to in Christ—the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells—leaves the old world for dead.

The reference is in Galatians 6:14–15:

May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which [or *through whom*] 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!

We will come back to the amazing statement, ‘a new creation is everything!’ First, what does it mean to say: ‘the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world’?

### THIS PRESENT EVIL AGE

There is testimony in the New Testament that Christ’s death saves us not just from our sins but from the corrupt and evil world in which we live:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen (Gal. 1:3–5).

This may come as a shock to some of us, who remain rather attached to the age in which we live, and who enjoy being alive in this world. Yet the witness is there:

His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3–4).

While we may give intellectual and verbal assent to such a transition, it is likely that many of us would like to retain the best of both worlds. Much of what passes for Christianity appears to be a veneer of faith over forms of self-serving comfort that are quite at home in the world as it is. We need the jolt of revelation to see things differently, and to live accordingly. Such a revelation is given in the vision of the ‘great whore . . . Babylon’ that was shown to John:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the judgment of the great whore who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk.’ So he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: ‘Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth’s abominations’ (Rev. 17:1–5).

It is evident from this picture that ‘Babylon’ has to do with power, wealth, and rulers of the earth, in league with the ‘scarlet beast’—the ‘great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns . . . that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan’ (Rev. 12:3, 9). Her ‘golden cup’ indicates alluring attractiveness on the outside, but contaminated foulness on the inside, and the reference to ‘blasphemous names’ shows that she is inherently opposed to God and all who belong to God:

And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus (Rev. 17:6).

Even knowing this is not enough to stop John, or us, from coming under the spell of Babylon’s alluring enticements:

When I saw her, I was greatly amazed. But the angel said to me, ‘Why are you so amazed?’ (Rev. 17:6–7).

Such amazement at the greatness of Babylon and at the beast that carries her is not for those whose names are written in ‘the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered’ (Rev. 13:8). In contrast with ‘the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come’ (Rev. 4:8), these impressive entities do not have eternal reality. Those who do not belong to the Lamb, who are taken in by Babylon, are the ones who will be ‘amazed’—when this is uncovered:

I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will be amazed when they see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come (Rev. 17:7–8).

Jesus himself, in the presence of those who were self-satisfied, called this age ‘an evil and adulterous generation’ (Matt. 12:39; 16:4). Even among his own followers he was constrained to cry out:

You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? (Matt. 17:17).

### **Questions for Reflection**

- *How does Jesus’ and the apostles’ estimate of this world differ from our own?*
- *To what extent are we, in our community and in our churches, still caught up in the allurements of this world?*

## THE RULER OF THIS WORLD

The devil offered Jesus the authority he claimed to have over ‘all the kingdoms of the world’:

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, ‘To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours’ (Luke 4:5–7).

Jesus saw through the devil’s ruse, that such ‘authority’ would come only by submitting to the devil’s authority—as we all did in the Garden (see Gen. 3:1–6)—and he refused it:

Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him” ’ (Luke 4:8).

Since the devil is ‘a liar and the father of lies’ (John 8:44), we cannot trust that he is telling the truth when he says that ‘all this authority . . . has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please’ (Luke 4:6). Whatever the appearance of things, it is probable that Satan in his own understanding of it suffers a delusion on this score. Doubtless Jesus gave his answer in the knowledge that ‘The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it’ (Psalm 24:1), and that the Father had said to him:

You are my son;  
today I have begotten you.  
Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,  
and the ends of the earth your possession (Ps. 2:7–8; compare Luke 3:22)

—alongside which the devil’s posturing is nothing more than a pale, vile, and apish imitation.

Even so, Jesus on more than one occasion called Satan ‘the ruler of this world’ (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Certainly Jesus saw that the rulers of his own day were subject to Satan’s will:

You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires (John 8:44).

The apostle John was saying nothing more than his master when he observed:

We know that we are God’s children, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19).

In saying this, he is saying that this power of the evil one does not extend over the children of God any more than it has extended over the Son of God himself:

We know that those who are born of God do not sin, but the one who was born of God protects them, and the evil one does not touch them (1 John 5:18).

While Satan’s rulership over this world is thus acknowledged, it becomes evident that Satan’s rulership is of a very different order from God’s rulership. God rules by right (see e.g. Ps. 93:1–2<sup>1</sup>), in a way that serves and saves His creation for its good (as in 2 Sam. 23:1–7<sup>2</sup>).

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<sup>1</sup> The LORD is king, he is robed in majesty;  
the LORD is robed, he is girded with strength.  
He has established the world; it shall never be moved;  
your throne is established from of old;  
you are from everlasting.

<sup>2</sup> Here in the last words of king David, given to him by God, we see that true ruling done in the fear of God, that is, in right and obedient relationship with God according to the way that God Himself rules, is like the sun coming up in the morning, and like the rain on the grass, and clears out evil without becoming contaminated by it.

Satan's 'rulership' is usurped, and for its own advantage (as in Isa. 14:12–15; Ezek. 28:15–17<sup>3</sup>) which, in the end, serves 'only to steal and kill and destroy' (John 10:10). We see how Satan's 'rulership', being only for self-advantage, at the expense of others, holds within it the seeds of its own destruction:

The waters that you saw, where the whore is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the whore; they will make her desolate and naked; they will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire (Rev. 17:15–16).

This is not left just to play itself out automatically, but happens under the deliberate intention and action of God, to serve His good purpose:

For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by agreeing to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled (Rev. 17:17).

### **Questions for Reflection**

- *What is the difference between God's and Satan's rulership of this world?*
- *What is the inherent outcome of each form of rulership?*

## **THE JUDGEMENT OF THIS WORLD**

Jesus saw his death, when he was 'lifted up' on the cross, as nothing less than the judgement of this world, and the driving out of Satan:

'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.' He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die (John 12:31–33).

In what way was the death of Christ the judgement of this world? It exposed the deadly opposition of 'the rulers of this world' to the reign of God and His Messiah (see Ps. 2:2–3;<sup>4</sup> cf. Acts 4:24–28): the end-point of the world's doomed agenda and expending of energy is nothing better than to crucify the Lord of glory, and kill the Author of life (see 1 Cor. 2:6–8; Acts 3:15). Christ's bearing of the guilt of all human sin and God's wrath against all human sin in his flesh, for our salvation and for the liberation of the whole creation (see 1 Pet. 2:24; Rom. 8:3), made this action of the cross the final bar of judgement for the whole world (as in Mark 8:38<sup>5</sup>). The drawing of all people into Christ's death shows that we were taken into that final judgement of this world. It is on this basis that Paul can say, for himself and us:

the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Gal. 6:14).

Not only are we thereby dissociated from the evil world system, but we are also given a position of victory over the world and its ways, in our practice of the ways of God:

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<sup>3</sup> Addressed to the kings of Babylon and Tyre, these prophecies depict human manifestations of the diabolical agenda, which meet their doom accordingly.

<sup>4</sup> The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers take counsel together,  
against the LORD and his anointed, saying,

'Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us'.

<sup>5</sup> 'Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels'.

For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

(1 John 5:3–5).

We find that this is indeed the case with the ‘Babylon’ world. In Revelation 17:9–12 something of the authority of the rulers of this world, and their relationship with the woman and the beast, are depicted, and then we are told of the victory of Christ and of those with him:

These are united in yielding their power and authority to the beast; they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful (Rev. 17:13–14).

### **Questions for Reflection**

- *What is the relationship between the cross of Christ and the judgement of this world? How does the cross of Christ effect the defeat of this world and its ways?*
- *What is our relationship with the cross of Christ? How does this effect our dissociation from this world and our participation in its defeat?*

## **FALLEN, FALLEN IS BABYLON THE GREAT!**

Revelation 18 depicts the fearful and grievous outcome of the Lamb’s conquest of this world:

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority; and the earth was made bright with his splendor. He called out with a mighty voice,

‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

It has become a dwelling place of demons,  
a haunt of every foul spirit,  
a haunt of every foul bird,  
a haunt of every foul and hateful beast.

For all the nations have drunk  
of the wine of the wrath of her fornication,  
and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her,  
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxury’ (Rev. 18:1–3).

It is in her fall that we begin to see Babylon as she really is. It is also made plain that there are now those who are no longer part of Babylon and her ways:

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

‘Come out of her, my people,  
so that you do not take part in her sins,  
and so that you do not share in her plagues;  
for her sins are heaped high as heaven,  
and God has remembered her iniquities.

Render to her as she herself has rendered,  
and repay her double for her deeds;  
mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed.

As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously,  
so give her a like measure of torment and grief.

Since in her heart she says,

‘I rule as a queen;

I am no widow,

and I will never see grief,”  
therefore her plagues will come in a single day—  
pestilence and mourning and famine—  
and she will be burned with fire;  
for mighty is the Lord God who judges her’ (Rev. 18:4–8).

Those whose attachment has been to Babylon are devastated by its fall:

And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning; they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, ‘Alas, alas, the great city, Babylon, the mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’ And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron, and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, choice flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, slaves—and human lives.

‘The fruit for which your soul longed  
has gone from you,  
and all your dainties and your splendour  
are lost to you,  
never to be found again!’

The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

‘Alas, alas, the great city,  
clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet,  
adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls!  
For in one hour all this wealth has been laid waste!’

And all shipmasters and seafarers, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

‘What city was like the great city?’

And they threw dust on their heads, as they wept and mourned, crying out,

‘Alas, alas, the great city,  
where all who had ships at sea  
grew rich by her wealth!

For in one hour she has been laid waste’ (Rev. 18:9–19).

The reaction of the kings, the merchants, the shipmasters, seafarers, sailors and traders is one of utter dismay at the fall of Babylon. For them she has been ‘the great city’, full of dainties, splendour and wealth. In her they have invested their all. Now it all has been taken from them in Babylon’s collapse. They now stand far off with nothing. No wonder they are dismayed!

They are not the only ones. Music-makers, artisans, food processors, and even newly-weds—a sample of all that we might consider entertaining, enjoyable or pleasurable in this world—will no longer be found there:

Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,

‘With such violence Babylon the great city  
will be thrown down,  
and will be found no more;  
and the sound of harpists and minstrels and of flutists and trumpeters  
will be heard in you no more;  
and an artisan of any trade  
will be found in you no more;  
and the sound of the millstone  
will be heard in you no more;  
and the light of a lamp  
will shine in you no more;

and the voice of bridegroom and bride  
will be heard in you no more;  
for your merchants were the magnates of the earth,  
and all nations were deceived by your sorcery' (Rev. 18:21–23).

We ourselves may feel pangs of loss and disappointment just hearing this. For we, no less than others, have invested so much of our lives in this world that the throwing down of Babylon strikes at our own hearts as well. I remember when, as a young man, I first read these chapters, my breath was taken away.

### **Question for Reflection**

- *Where do we stand: with those who are dismayed at Babylon's demise, or with those who see Babylon for what it is, and is not, and are glad to be able to 'come out of her'?*

## **A NEW CREATION IS EVERYTHING!**

Our dissociation from this Babylon-world and our participation in the defeat of its evil ways is not just in the here and now. It is anticipation of, and participation in, a reality that is to come. For those who live by faith in the Son of God, this is now the main game. Paul's being crucified as far as the world is concerned looked wholly towards what is to replace it:

May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which [or *through whom*] 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).

This is not the only place Paul spoke in this way:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Cor. 5:17).

This is sometimes taken to be personal: that each believer in Christ is a new creation. True as that is (as in Eph. 2:10: 'created in Christ Jesus for good works'), that is not what Paul is saying here. The literal translation is: 'So if anyone is in Christ: new creation!'<sup>6</sup> As Paul goes on to say, not just the person, but 'everything has become new!' The new creation is the believer's whole reality.

What then, is the new creation? Peter spoke of the flood in Noah's day as a judgement on the world of that time, and went on to speak of judgement on the evil of this present world:

But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless (2 Pet. 3:7).

He calls this 'the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire' (2 Pet. 3:12). He then speaks of what we have our eager expectations set on:

But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home (2 Pet. 3:13).

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<sup>6</sup> ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις.

It is in the light of this reality that Peter asks: ‘what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness’ (2 Pet. 3:11)—to live now in a way that matches the unalloyed righteousness of what will be then.

Paul similarly saw that our present belonging is to this reality, in contrast to those whose ‘end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things’ (Phil. 3:19):

But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself (Phil. 3:20–21).

This way of living is an anticipation of nothing less than the life of the resurrection body! The writer to the Hebrews sees this present placement as being grounded firmly in the atonement wrought by Christ:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb. 12:22–24).

### **Questions for Reflection**

- *How significant is the new creation in our present experience and hope?*
- *To what extent are our present thoughts and actions determined by our present and future belonging there?*

## **IN THE WORLD, NOT OF IT**

Jesus stood before one of the rulers of this world and said:

My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here (John 18:36).

He also said that the same thing applied to his followers:

They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world (John 17:16).

Even so, he prayed to his Father:

I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one (John 17:15).

How are we, for this life, to be very much in this world, without belonging to it? A letter written by Jeremiah to the exiles in literal Babylon, over five hundred years before Christ, may help us:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I

have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare (Jer. 29:4–7).

Far from being ‘other-worldly’ or ‘out of this world’, we are to be very active within it, in the everyday activities of this life. Paul similarly exhorted Christian believers who were living in the imminent expectation of the Lord’s return:

For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right (2 Thess. 3:11–13).

Such idleness Paul sees as the very antithesis of the message he brought, and of the example he gave them (see 2 Thess. 3:6–16).

In this same spirit, Martin Luther is recorded as saying, ‘Even though the world ends tomorrow, I will still plant my tree today’!

Jesus, however, warned against making the good things of this life the be-all and end-all of our existence:

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all of them. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot: they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven and destroyed all of them—it will be like that on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, anyone on the housetop who has belongings in the house must not come down to take them away; and likewise anyone in the field must not turn back. Remember Lot’s wife. Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it (Luke 17:26–33).

Accordingly, Paul knew how to hang loose to the things of this world, in his reliance on the Lord:

I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me (Phil. 4:11–13).

Paul exhorted his hearers to do the same:

I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away (1 Cor. 7:29–31).

The apostle John summed it up this way:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever (1 John 2:15–17).

### **Questions for Reflection**

- *What does it mean for us in practice to live in the world, while not belonging to it?*
- *How does the gospel sustain us in this strange relationship?*

## GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

John tells us the reason Jesus came:

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3:16–17).

—even though that ‘world’ was so far gone in wilful rebellion and sin that it could be said to lie ‘under the power of the evil one’ (1 John 5:19). Indeed, that is why it needed saving.

Jesus inducted his disciples into this same mission, by virtue of his saving death and resurrection, with the peace of the forgiveness of sins that flows from this in our proclaiming of the gospel (compare Luke 24:45–49):

Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’ (John 20:19–22).

So we are not to live in this world just putting up with it for the time being until we get to something better. The sinful world is our proper arena of operations in the deliberate appointment of God, for His saving purposes. Our very being and lifestyle is to be for the world’s good:

Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world (Phil. 2:14–15).

So for Paul it is unthinkable that we should seek to take ourselves out of the world:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons—not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world (1 Cor. 5:9–10).

How else will God’s salvation ‘reach to the end of the earth’ (Isa. 49:6)? So we are in the world with Christ as ‘the light of the world’ (John 8:12; Matt. 5:14).

So we are to be in the world, ‘holding fast the word of life’ (Phil. 2:16). Yet at the same time we are bidden ‘to keep oneself unstained from the world’ (James 1:27). Is this an unbearable tension? Not if we are sure of the atoning sacrifice that alone brings the cleansing and forgiveness of sins. Without that, we will either opt out completely, or else we will end up condoning and endorsing whatever the world serves up, because we haven’t the heart to say it is wrong. We carry in our bodies ‘the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God’ (2 Cor. 4:4). Peter says:

Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge (1 Pet. 2:12).

### **Questions for Reflection**

- *What appreciation do we have of God’s holy love for the sinful world?*
- *How does that love govern our relationship with the sinful world and its inhabitants?*

## THE WORLD HATES YOU

Jesus told us what the Spirit would do to the world when we proclaim Christ:

when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned (John 16:8–11).

This spells the doom of the world's way of seeing and doing things. For those of this world who are wedded to these ways, this will not come easily. Inevitably this means that the world will give us a hard time:

You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme. But they will have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Pet. 4:3–5).

For this very reason we should not withhold the gospel from the world, even though we know that 'all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted' (2 Tim. 3:12).

We are very sensitive to what others think of us, and to what they may do to us. Jesus spoke to those who look to 'accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God' (John 5:44; compare 12:43; Rom. 2:29; Gal. 1:10). It is in this context that Paul speaks of having been crucified to the world:

It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised—only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. 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! As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God (Gal. 6:12–16).

While there are those who will seek to avoid persecution by playing the world's game, there is a real peace that comes, even in the midst of persecution, for those who look to the new creation.

Jesus warned us that we would not be able to avoid persecution, even while there are those who will accept the word of the gospel:

If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'Servants are not greater than their master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. It was to fulfill the word that is written in their law, 'They hated me without a cause.' (John 15:18–25).

In this setting, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, by whom the testimony to Jesus will be sustained (see John 15:26–27). He then anticipates what will happen to us:

I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to

God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me. But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them (John 16:1–4).

And he concludes:

I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world! (John 16:33).

This conquest of the world is also ours, through our faith in him:

whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4–5).

### ***Questions for Reflection***

- *What experience have we had of persecution on account of belonging to Christ?*
- *In what ways have we sought to avoid being thought ill of on this account?*
- *What have we known of Christ's conquest and peace in the midst of persecution?*