

# ALIVE TO GOD: CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

## Study Ten

### YOU HAVE DIED: TO SELF, SIN, AND THE FLESH

#### THE FINAL BREAK

So far we have seen that we cannot simply drift into becoming a Christian believer by some process of adjustment or improvement on our part. We cannot live with Christ without having died with him:

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

Nor is this dying an ongoing process, as some would have it,<sup>1</sup> by which we progressively tidy ourselves up with a view to coming, hopefully, to a certain attainable level of sinlessness in the future. Paul's language insists that it is a past, final, once-for-all happening:

all have died (2 Cor. 5:14).

I have been crucified (Gal. 2:19).

you have died (Col. 3:3).

consider yourselves dead (Rom. 6:11).

We have thought about the different ways in which the question 'When did we die?' could be approached,<sup>2</sup> but the testimony of the New Testament regarding this death of ours is to a finalised reality, that is demarcated particularly in baptism:

we have been buried with him by baptism into death (Rom. 6:4; compare Col. 2:12).

When Jesus, before he died, said that his followers were to 'take up their cross' (Mark 8:34), he was saying that they would not be able to bypass, with him, the place of execution. When he said they were to 'take up their cross daily' (Luke 9:23), he meant that they were to live every day in the reality of having been crucified with him.

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<sup>1</sup> For example: 'Grant Lord, that as we have been baptised into the death of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, so by continually putting to death our sinful desires we may die to sin and be buried with him, and that through the grave and gate of death we may pass to our joyful resurrection' (Collect for Holy Saturday, Anglican Church of Australia, *A Prayer Book for Australia*, Shorter Edition, Broughton Books, Alexandria, 1995, p. 454). This form of prayer draws on an amalgam of Scriptural allusions without doing justice to their over all context, as we shall see. The prayer book in use by the author now sports the corrected (!) version as follows: 'Grant Lord, that as we have been baptised into the death of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, so *we may* continually *put* to death our sinful desires *as those who have died* to sin and *been* buried with him . . .'

<sup>2</sup> See study 4, with its headings: 'Before the Foundation of the World', 'When Jesus Died', 'The Faith Relationship', 'Baptised into His Death', and 'When Christ is Revealed'.

We have looked at what it means for human beings to live, and to die, as moral creatures in relationship with God. We have seen how having died with Christ leaves us, at last, as ‘a people humble and lowly’ (Zeph. 3:12), with a realistic understanding and experience of who we are, and what we are capable of, along with an unforgettable appreciation of the greatness of our salvation. In the light of this we have reflected particularly on how we are to deal with the issues of ongoing and indwelling sin in ourselves and others.

The New Testament says that, having been crucified with Christ, we have died to a number of entities: self, sin, the flesh, the law and the world. What does it mean to die to these things? Richard Longenecker says:

In Pauline usage, ‘to die to’ something is to cease to have any further relation to it . . . Conversely, ‘to live to’ someone means to have personal, unrestricted relationship with that one.<sup>3</sup>

Longenecker draws attention to what Jesus said in Luke 20:38, how Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, being in relationship with God who is the God of the living, ‘are alive’ to Him. In this and the next study we will look at how we are affected by the action of the cross with regard to each of these entities. This will clear the ground for going on into knowing what it is to have our life ‘hidden with Christ in God’ (Col. 3:3), to now live ‘for him’ (2 Cor. 5:15), in ‘the righteousness from God based on faith’ in Christ (Phil. 3:9).

## I HAVE BEEN CRUCIFIED

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about what now drives his ministry:

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 (2 Cor. 5:14–15).

Elsewhere, Paul says that he died, ‘so that I might live to God’ (Gal. 2:19). Living to God, not to ourselves—as also from God and not from ourselves—is the way we were originally made to be:

he himself gives to all . . . life and breath and all things . . . so that they would search for God . . . and find him (Acts 17:25, 27).

for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist (1 Cor. 8:6).

For from him and through him and to him are all things (Rom. 11:36).

Living for ourselves and not for God is the great lie we fell for, and the great sin (see Gen. 3:1–6). Preoccupation with ourselves is what now bedevils, belittles and distorts our lives and ministries.

Paul has now found something better than that—or rather it, or He, has found Paul. It is living for Christ, and living to God, the way we were all originally designed to be, in ‘the love of Christ’ (2 Cor. 5:14). This love has come through to Paul in the action of the cross:

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. 2:20).

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<sup>3</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC vol. 41, Word Books, Dallas, 1990, p. 91.

This is not just a cosy reciprocal relationship—he loved me so now I love him. What came through to Paul was that this love in that death is ‘for all’ (2 Cor. 5:15). So it is this ‘love of Christ . . . for all’ that now constrains Paul in his ministry, even if it means that at times he and his companions appear to be ‘beside ourselves’ for God’s sake (2 Cor. 5:13). Paul has become convinced that ‘in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them’, even to the extent that ‘For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’ (2 Cor. 5:19, 21). It is the thoroughgoing and far-reaching nature of this reconciling love of God in Christ, and the overwhelming grace of God in entrusting this ministry and message of reconciliation to the very sinners who have been saved by it, that enlivens, fully sustains, and urges Paul on in his ministry to all.

This is what cancels out and leaves no room for preoccupation with self. Paul was simply stating facts when he said:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me (Gal. 2:19–20).

Sometimes the point is made that the cross is an ‘I’ crossed out. The implications of that often are that we, by some self-effort, are to rid ourselves of our self-concern, and give priority to the things of Christ and of God. We can no more do that than we are capable of crucifying ourselves. Paul is saying that this has already happened to us: we have died, and we are already living to something much better.

Jesus was saying much the same thing when, shortly before he went to the cross, he spoke of the grain of wheat:

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 (John 12:24).

Was Jesus speaking here of himself, or us? The answer is, both: of himself, and of us in him. A grain of wheat is designed to bear much fruit. There is no point to it having an existence of itself for itself. So it is taken through the process that is necessary to enable it to bear much fruit. Human beings are no less fearfully and wonderfully made to bear much fruit—in a way that far surpasses the output of a grain of wheat!—and have needed no less to be taken through the necessary process in the cross of Christ (see John 15:1–17<sup>4</sup>). Especially since, unlike the grain of wheat, we have forsaken our proper being and purpose in God, and we needed to be restored and taken on to its fulfilment.

It is in the light of this accomplished reality that we must now see Jesus’ statements, so prominent in all four gospels, concerning denial of self. The Johannine form follows immediately after the parable of the grain of wheat:

Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor (John 12:25–26).

Far from being, as it is often made out to be, an ascetical or self-deprecating exercise, losing or hating our own life in this world involves having gone with Jesus to the place where he has gone—the cross/glory (compare John 12:28; 13:31–32; 17:1, 5; Gal. 6:14)—to come with

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<sup>4</sup> For the relationship of what Jesus is saying here to the action of the cross that follows, see: Martin Bleby, *The Vinedresser: An Anglican Meets Wrath and Grace* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1985), pp. 22–24.

him into the Father-honouring fruit-bearing that we have been made for.<sup>5</sup> In the synoptic versions of this saying, our participation in the action of the cross of Christ is no less central:

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For 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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? (Mark 8:34–37; compare Matt. 10:38–39; 16:24–26; Luke 9:23–25; 14:27; 17:33).

As long as our focus remains on our own lives, and whether we have lost or saved them, we still will not understand these sayings—our very mindset will be running contrary to them. When we see that our life is a gift from God, to be lived from God for His rich purposes, we will not want to have it any other way.

### **Questions for Reflection**

- *What have we known of trying to die to self as a kind of ascetical or self-deprecating exercise?*
- *How is that different from being constrained by the love of Christ?*

## **DEAD TO SIN**

Paul summarises what he has to say in Romans 6 about our present relationship with sin in these words:

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:11).

What is meant by ‘dead to sin’? Those who still wish to shore themselves up against sin by some assurance more or other than simple faith in Christ’s completed atonement may seek to give a meaning to this that the apostle did not intend. They may want to say that they are now impervious to temptation or incapable of sinning. What we have considered in the last few studies should give the lie to that. One way it can be put is that, while we are dead to sin (whatever that means, as we shall see), sin is certainly not dead to us, but very dynamically present and of itself stronger than we are of ourselves (see studies 6–9, especially on Rom. 7:7–25).

The phrase ‘dead to sin’ has two stages of meaning in Paul’s usage: justified from sin, and freed from sin’s dominion. In both of these, the main focus is not on our relationship with sin, but on what it means to be ‘alive to God’.

## **Justified from Sin**

While most translations of Romans 6:7 say: ‘whoever has died is *freed* from sin’, it comes as a startling enlightenment to us that what Paul actually wrote was:

whoever has died is *justified* [δεδικαίωται, *dedikaiotai*] from sin.

‘Justified’ is a term that is connected with the law (see further below). It has the meaning of being justly acquitted or cleared from a charge in a court of law. In the case of a guilty party,

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<sup>5</sup> See further: Geoffrey C. Bingham, *Comprehending Fruitfulness to God*, NCPI, Blackwood, 2000.

this would occur upon the execution of the offender: the Scottish statute books recorded such an event as, ‘John Brown was justified today’! That would make sense of what Paul says here: ‘whoever has died is justified from sin’. The context in Romans 6, however, is our death by virtue of our baptism into Christ’s death for us (linked in Col. 2:12 with ‘faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead’), where we find ourselves not dead but very much ‘alive to God in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 6:11). For us in this setting, then, to be justified from sin is to be held as guiltless and accepted as righteous, in Christ. This is now the base and ground of our entire life with God, with ourselves, and with each other.

This is not just an individual state, but one which affects all:

We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed (Rom. 6:6).

The phrase ‘our old self’ is literally ‘our old *man* [ἄνθρωπος, *anthrōpos*]’—a reference to Adam, and our corporate humanity in him.<sup>6</sup> On the cross of Christ, we as a sinful human race met our doom. While in the flesh we still walk around in this ‘body of sin’, which Paul calls in Romans 7:24 ‘this body of death’—this carcass of Adam—those who are in Christ will know deliverance from it:

But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him (Rom. 6:8).

To be justified from sin also has more to do with the righteousness that is to come than with the unrighteousness that has been dealt with. The whole context of Romans 6 is the resurrection of Christ, and our future resurrection with him:

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).

We are told elsewhere that the setting of our future resurrected life will be ‘new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home’ (2 Pet. 3:13). This will be for those who have ‘come to repentance’ and are ‘found by him at peace, without spot or blemish’ (2 Pet. 3:9, 14). Righteousness, and only righteousness, will inhabit the new heavens and new earth. Our salvation now is intended to fit us for our new life then. Romans 6:7 could be translated: ‘whoever has died is *righteousified* from sin’—if there were such a word in English. While we may be glad and relieved to be freed from our burden of guilt, God is more interested in making us fit for His kingdom (see Luke 9:62; 1:74–79; Eph. 1:3–7; Col. 1:12). Our life with God must not stop at the (still rather self-centred) relief at the forgiveness of sins. It must move on in eager appreciation and anticipation of, and participation in, the whole new life of righteousness.

## Set Free from Sin

This new life of righteousness is in view from the beginning of Romans 6:

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. 6:4).

Reference is made to the dominion by which we were enslaved to sin when we were still in guilt (compare Jesus in John 8:34: ‘everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin’):

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<sup>6</sup> Acknowledgement: Ian Pennicook, in one of the NCTM Ministry Schools. See what Paul has to say earlier about Adam and Christ in Rom. 5:12–21.

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? (Rom. 6:16).

It is the reality of guilt—the very fact that we have committed sin—that holds us in slavery to the further perpetration of sin, and prevents us from emerging out of it. Sin has an inbuilt deceit (see Heb. 3:13), and an inherent self-justifying mechanism which drives us to repeat the offence more brazenly to make out there is nothing wrong with it (see Rom. 1:18–21, 32). With this goes the defiant mindset that virtually seeks out God’s law in order to go against it (see Rom. 1:22–31; 7:8, 13) or, perversely, sets up some keeping of God’s law as a vain attempt to counteract the breaking of it. All of this dooms us, especially once it comes under the wrath of God, as God gives us over to ever-compounding sinfulness (see Rom. 1:24, 26, 28), and effectively locks us into this disobedience (see Rom. 11:32).

We may attempt to deal with sin by tackling it head on, or by attempting to remove it piece by piece, but none of this reaches the root that entrenches sin, which is actual guilt. While we may think that we are stuck with that, nothing less than the erasure of our guilt is what God’s great justification of us in Christ sets out to do, and effectively carries through. Christ, having ‘committed no sin’, was never subject to its domination. Nevertheless, freely in love, in full obedience to the Father’s will, he submitted to it: God ‘made him to be sin who knew no sin’ (2 Cor. 5:21), and ‘condemned sin in the flesh’ of His own Son (Rom. 8:3), in the one ‘who takes away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29). Thus in Christ ‘we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us’ (Eph. 1:7–8).

Who of us could ever comprehend this total erasure of guilt? Once ‘your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out’ (Isa. 6:7), and this has been received by faith, the enslaving guilt–sin nexus has been broken, and we are free not to be repeat offenders. It is not that we have become incapable of sinning, but we have been made able not to sin. The apostle John said of his gospel—amazingly—‘My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin’ (1 John 2:1). It is not that we cannot sin, but that we can not sin. We can hear and obey the words of Jesus: ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again’ (John 8:11)—the not sinning flows from the no condemnation.

This is what Paul is keen to convey in Romans 6:

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.

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, 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. 6:9–14).

The word Paul uses for ‘set free’ in Romans 6:18 (ἐλευθερωθέντες, *eleutherothentes*) is different from that used in Romans 6:7. There he was speaking of being justified from the guilt of sin. Here he is speaking of what follows from that: freedom from the enslaving dominion of sin:

But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:17–18).

Paul's conclusion is stated at the beginning of the chapter: 'How can we who died to sin go on living in it?' (Rom. 6:2). It is not just a matter of not sinning, however. Note how quickly Paul passes from that to the positive life of righteousness—not just as a balancing counter-measure, but as that which overwhelmingly outshines it:

For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:19–23).

Note also how the 'righteousness' is geared towards 'eternal life'. Once again, the main focus of being freed from sin is not on our relationship with sin, but on what it means to be 'alive to God'.

### **Questions for Reflection**

- *How is considering ourselves 'dead to sin' related to 'whoever has died is justified from sin', and what connection does this have with the death of Christ?*
- *How does being 'dead to sin' relate to being freed from the dominion of sin and being 'enslaved to God' as 'slaves to righteousness', and what does this have to do with Jesus Christ?*

## **FLESH CRUCIFIED**

In Galatians 5:24 Paul says:

those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The positive context in which this statement is made has to do with living by the Spirit of God:

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–25).

If 'the flesh with its passions and desires' has got in the way of this wonderful living by the Spirit, then we may be glad it has been crucified and got out of the way. Especially when we find that it has given rise to such unattractive and harmful behaviours as becoming 'conceited, competing against one another, envying one another' (Gal. 5:26). Paul has already detailed the odious comparison:

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:16–21).

It is good to know that what has given rise to all of that has been deservedly crucified.

There is nothing wrong with our God-given flesh, as such. It is where we live,<sup>7</sup> both before and after we have come to belong to Christ:

the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God (Gal. 2:20).

‘Jesus Christ has come in the flesh’ (1 John 4:2)—it can’t be all bad. But the flesh will have its day. Flesh is perishable material:

flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable (1 Cor. 15:50).

Something will need to happen to our perishable flesh to make it capable of sustaining ‘an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure’ (2 Cor. 4:17)—it will need to be eternalised and glorified. This will happen in the resurrection of the body:

we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:51–53).<sup>8</sup>

The upshot of this is that we can never make this flesh, as it is, our permanent home.<sup>9</sup> Yet not only have we sought to do that, but we have settled upon it as if it is some independent ground of our own, apart from God—a foolish notion, since God Himself ‘gives to all . . . life and breath and all things’ (Acts 17:25). From there we have sought to make this flesh the base of our operations over against God: we have taken it upon ourselves to decide what is right or wrong (see Gen. 3:5), and to ‘make a name for ourselves’ (Gen. 11:4). This is an exercise doomed to failure, and subjected to the curse, yet we persist. It is from this mindset and attitude of heart that all human evils come, as Jesus said:

For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person (Mark 7:21–23).

There can be no rapprochement between God and this monstrous thing we have become:

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom. 8:6–8).

The Spirit comes to bring us to belong to Jesus Christ: ‘Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him’ (Rom. 8:9). The Spirit makes real to us what has happened to us on the cross, where God ‘condemned sin in the flesh’ (Rom. 8:3). So:

if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness [*or* justification] (Rom. 8:10).

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<sup>7</sup> Everything we do, including the thoughts we think, involve the functioning of our God-given flesh. When a husband and wife engage in sexual intimacy, that is very much a matter of the flesh and, when done in faithfulness, is a thing of purity and chastity.

<sup>8</sup> Note that we are talking here about ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’ (1 Cor. 2:9), which must necessarily be spoken of in some kind of picture language.

<sup>9</sup> Not that the flesh in the end is discarded. Further to what he has said in 1 Cor. 15:53, Paul speaks in 2 Cor. 5:4: ‘we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life’.

To such, Paul is able to say: ‘you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you’ (Rom. 8:9) or, as we began:

those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

So we are now those ‘who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh’ (Phil. 3:3). It is not a matter of battling to put the flesh down. Rather it is a case of living with the ‘flesh’ (in the bad sense) as that which we have already scrapped. Paul spells out the implications of that, from the perspective of the new life:

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, 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 (Col. 3:1–4).

Note what this has primarily in view: our present participation in Christ as the resurrected, glorified humanity in person. This is what has taken over from our seeking to use our own flesh here and now as the base of our operations over against God, which in no way fits with it:

Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth (Col. 3:5–8).

Does this mean that we are to focus on these things to get rid of them in ourselves? That is likely to be counterproductive: it may mean that we end up being more preoccupied with them; thus compounding them and making the situation worse. No: rather it is conforming ourselves with something that has already happened:

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator (Col. 3: 9–10).

This ‘being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator’ again has to do with our new humanity in the risen and glorified Christ. This is the new thing that is happening as a result of our having been crucified and raised with Christ. This is the reality on which our conscious putting to death of the things of the flesh (in the bad old sense) is based.

This new reality is also that which enables what has been ‘put to death’ to be replaced with what is much better:

As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:12–17).

We are still capable of operating from our own flesh over against God and all others. Paul found it necessary to warn fellow believers:

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith (Gal. 6:7–10).

Paul spelled out the eternal consequences of sowing to the Spirit, or to the flesh. All who believe in Jesus—who build their lives on the one foundation which is Jesus Christ—will be saved. The question, when it comes to the judgement of rewards and losses,<sup>10</sup> is what we may have to show for it in our lives:

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire (1 Cor. 3:11–15).

This reward or ‘prize’ is ‘the goal’ for which Paul presses on:

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12–14).

Such striving would not be necessary if it is salvation that he is talking about, of which he is already assured. It is for this ‘prize’ (elsewhere Paul refers to those he has brought to Christ as his ‘joy and crown’: see Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19) that Paul strives like an Olympic athlete:

Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified (1 Cor. 9:24–27).

It is for this that Peter urges us to have a richly supplied (rather than meagre) entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (see 2 Pet. 1:11).

Once again, it is the desirability of these things of the Spirit that leaves the other old things for dead.

### **Questions for Reflection**

- *What is the importance for our present-day living of seeing the crucifixion of the flesh as a past and completed event? What is the effect when we do not see it this way?*
- *What is it that has happened to us in a positive way that leaves the things of the flesh for dead?*

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<sup>10</sup> This is to be distinguished from the judgement with regard to eternal salvation: see the distinction in Rev. 20:11–15 between ‘the book of life’ (see also Rev. 13:8), which determines whether or not you end up in the ‘the second death, the lake of fire’, and ‘the books’ from which all are ‘judged according to their works . . . according to what they had done’; see also Jesus’ parable in Luke 19:11–27, where there are ‘enemies’ who rebel and are slaughtered (vv. 14, 27), and ‘slaves’ who receive a greater or lesser reward according to what they have done with what they were given. See further: Martin Bleby, *God’s Holy Love: For Newcomers to Christian Faith*, NCPI, Blackwood, 2001, pp. 225–31.