

Dead to the World – ?

This is the fifth and last aspect of ‘Five Ways Dead – But Very Much Alive’¹ and the fourth way in which we are joined to the death of Jesus – AND to his resurrection!

For me, this phrase always brings back boyhood memories. Those mornings when I didn’t need to go to school but didn’t really want to get out of bed either. There I would be, pretending to be asleep so that my mother wouldn’t expect me to get up, and she would come into my bedroom to see whether I was awake or not, perhaps softly calling my name. If my deception had been effective, very often she would leave the room saying quietly to herself: ‘He’s dead to the world.’ (And of course I heard what she said.)

What did she mean by that? Of course she knew that I wasn’t really dead, so what did ‘dead to the world’ mean to her? I hadn’t responded to her voice or any awareness of her presence in my room which, if I had been awake, would have been a normal reaction. She wasn’t getting through to me (or so she thought!) and so she thought that **nothing** was getting through. My unresponsiveness proved my ‘deadness’.

As we have been looking at different aspects of what it means to be joined into the death of the Lord Jesus, we have touched on **unresponsiveness**, and it can certainly help to give us a clearer picture of what it means to be ‘dead’: Dead to sin – no longer in slavery to wrongdoing and failure; Dead to self – no longer responding to the demands of self-assertion; Dead to law – no longer living under obligation to perform. In each case finding that, because we are included in the historical death of Jesus, these things don’t get through to us as they used to. We are learning to be unresponsive to them because we know that their hold on us is broken. We are ‘*dead to that which held us captive*’² and so we are free!

Once that reality begins to take hold in our lives, as our understanding grows that **we really are free**, we can move beyond passive unresponsiveness into **actively rejecting** these things to which we have been made dead by being joined to the death of Jesus.

Immediately after Paul has written “*Even so consider (= ‘count’) yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus*”, he writes “*Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body as instruments³ of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God*” (**Romans 6:11-13**). These are instructions for us to follow, not in the form of religious rules but rather as ways in which we can move forward **on the basis of what God has done for us in Jesus**. As if to emphasise that fact, his very next sentence is “*For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.*”

In my own mind, I think of this positively taking hold of our inheritance in the Lord Jesus Christ as ‘active abiding’. In **John 15**, he told us to ‘abide’ in him. ‘Abide’ means ‘stay’, and I think of staying in a large house and discovering more and more of the facilities that it offers. I’m already there, in the house, but by progressively making fuller use of what I discover there, I am **actively taking hold** of each feature. I can only do that because I am securely living in the house, ‘abiding’ in it.

In the same way, we can only really take hold of these ‘features’ of our new life in Jesus when we know that we are securely joined to him, we are **in** him and the inheritance is ours to take hold of. Many verses tell us this, but by far the most telling for me is **1 Corinthians 1:30**: “*But by his doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption*”.

¹ For the first two, and a general overview, see <https://justonecandle.substack.com/p/five-ways-dead> or <https://www.justonecandle.uk> (Search for ‘Five Ways Dead’).

² **Romans 7:6** (Revised Standard Version)

³ In every other passage where this word is used in the New Testament, it is translated as either ‘armour’ or ‘weapon’ !

There is one more important thing to which we are dead through the death of Jesus: the world ! Yes, it's not just my boyhood memory, Paul actually tells us that he is (and we are) dead to the world because we are joined into the death of Jesus – and it certainly has nothing to do with being physically asleep!

*“But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14).*¹ Once again, please note the past tense! Not ‘will be crucified’, ‘should be crucified’ or ‘might be crucified’ but ‘**has been** crucified’. There are two sides to this and we shall look at the second one first . . .

Paul says that he has been ‘crucified to the world’. Very graphic! We may have become accustomed to the idea of crucifixion because of our familiarity with the accounts of Jesus’ death, but crucifixion was the most barbaric and humiliating form of very public execution, with shame and total rejection by society. Paul says that he has been **made unresponsive to the world** in the same sort of way, by being joined to the death of Jesus on the cross.

What does that mean? What does Paul mean by ‘the world’? The Greek word is *kosmos*, which means the ‘arrangement’ or ‘setup’, the ‘world system’, the way that the world works. He is not talking about the natural created world but the way that mankind operates in the world. The fact that Jesus referred to Satan as ‘the ruler of this world’² is never very far away. As Watchman Nee writes: “That realm, that all-embracing *kosmos*, has many strange facets. Sin of course has its prior place there, and worldly lusts; but no less part of it are our more estimable human standards and ways of doing things. The human mind, its culture and its philosophies, all are included, together with all the very best of humanity’s social and political ideologies. Alongside these too we should doubtless place the world’s religions, and among them those speckled birds, worldly Christianity and its ‘world Church’. Wherever the power of natural man dominates, there you have an element in that system which is under the direct inspiration of Satan.”³ That’s a fairly comprehensive description!

What Paul is saying is that he is not responsive to the way the world system works; he has been separated from it. Peter and John had already seen that separation in **Acts 4:18-20**, when they had a brush with the Jewish authorities: *“And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.’”* Yes, they were religious authorities, but they were working according to the world system and against the kingdom of God, so Peter and John had no hesitation in disregarding them.

I can almost hear the protests: “But the Bible tells us to be subject to human authorities!” Yes, **Romans 13:1-7** makes it clear that we need to live as responsible citizens, paying taxes, etc. But later verses in the same chapter show that the present world order is temporary: *“The night is almost gone, and the day is near.”* There is a short anonymous letter, apparently written in the 2nd Century AD, which describes how Christians were seen at that time and shows that they had found ways of living ‘in the world but not of it’. Here’s a short excerpt: “They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives . . .”⁴

The actual word ‘world’ (*kosmos* in the Greek) is neutral. It is used for the created world and for the inhabitants of the world; for example: ‘for God so loved the world’ . . . **John 3:16**. But there is also a clearly sinister aspect. The actual created world may be neutral; in fact when it was created we know that, along with the whole of creation, it was ‘very good’ (**Genesis 1:31**). But after that, we know that Satan, ‘the prince of this world’, co-opted mankind to join him in rebellion against God, with the result that the world – which had been placed under mankind’s control – is now man-orientated and not God-orientated.

¹ ‘Through which’ could just as well be translated as ‘through whom’; the Greek is the same.

² **John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11.**

³ Watchman Nee, *Love Not The World*; ch. 3 ‘[A World Under Water](#)’. Read the whole book!

⁴ Find *The Epistle to Diognetus* at <https://www.justonecandle.uk/page6.html>

The Lord Jesus did not mince his words about the world system . . .

*"The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil" (John 7:7)
"And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world" (John 8:23)*

*"Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out" (John 12:31)
"the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you" (John 14:17)*

"I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me" (John 14:30) There are several more references to 'the world' in **John 14** ; well worth looking up!
"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you" (John 15:18-19).

*". . . and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged" (John 16:11)
"Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy" (John 16:20).*

"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John 17:14). More about the world – and the fact that Jesus' followers are not the world system – in **John 17**.

So, the Lord Jesus is very clear that we are not part of this man-orientated, Satan-driven system. But we see it all around us and can all too easily get sucked into it and the way it works. Does that mean that we should withdraw from all contact with 'the world' ?

People have tried that in the past, separating themselves from all external human contact and thereby hoping to stay clear of it all. But that simply doesn't work ! Communities that have tried that approach have found that, however much they may try to exclude the world, it's still there! Why? Because it's not just external; it's something inside every natural human being, just like sin, failure, self-centredness and legalism. Which is why a radical solution is the only one that works: **death to the world**. Or perhaps more precisely, **my** death to the world system.

I can't achieve that and nor can you. Those old monastic communities (and some more modern 'teachers') have tried to use 'spiritual disciplines' to 'mortify the flesh' and so separate themselves from those human weaknesses, including the pull of the world, trying (it seems) to arrive at a place where they are 'dead' to all these negative factors. Again, it doesn't work, and in fact these efforts are completely unnecessary, because we have been included in the death of Jesus and can say with Paul that through Jesus' death on the cross we are 'crucified to the world'.

As we have seen, God tells us that we are dead to sin and failure because we are included in the death of Jesus. To see that working out in practice in our lives, we need to first of all see that it is true (!) and then to count on it, to actively take hold of it. As Paul writes in **Romans 6:10-14**: *"For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so **consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.**"*

This is not passivity, expecting things to happen 'magically' without our involvement, but equally it is not us doing it all ourselves – or trying to! We are taking hold of what God has already completed for us in Jesus, entering into the 'finished work of Christ' – which really has been finished – and starting to see it working out in our lives. **The experience of truth.**

In the same way that we have found it beginning to work out as regards sin, failure, self-centredness and legalism, we can apply the same process to being dead to the world. **We have been** cut off from the world system through the death of Jesus and we can deliberately take hold of that as a fact.

And what is the 'resurrection' side of that death? If we are learning to be dead to the world system, what have we been made alive to? Well, obviously, 'dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus' covers

the whole spectrum, but specifically **the opposite of the world system is the kingdom of God**. We are already part of it through being born again, and there is a future aspect which will come into effect when Jesus returns to this earth and the announcement will be made that *“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15)*.

Meanwhile, the interaction of those who have been brought into the kingdom is vital, building on the real experience of each one, sharing in such a way that each one is able to grow and so seeing the whole ‘house’ built together – the Church! Not some organisational, man-made thing but the community of those who share in the resurrection life of Jesus.¹ If we do not know at least something of the reality of being dead to the world, it will be very difficult for us to be effective in seeing this resurrection community grow!

Which brings us to the other side of what Paul wrote in **Galatians 6:14**: *“But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which (or ‘whom’) the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* If Paul being crucified to the world meant that the world system no longer had a grip on him, that he was unresponsive to it, what could he mean when he says that the world has been crucified to him?

The same, the other way round! The world system has no grip on Paul and can’t ‘use’ him – and Paul has no grip on the world system and can’t use it! He is unable to use the world’s approach to any aspect of his life and work, and he explores this in some depth in **1 Corinthians 1 & 2**, specifically focusing on how he presents his message. He is writing both about how he presents the good news of Jesus and also about how he goes about presenting his teaching to believers. He refuses to use the wisdom of the world:

“Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” (1 Corinthians 1:20-25)

“I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” (ch.2:2)

“For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.” (ch.2:11-13)

These are just some excerpts. Please read through both chapters for **much** more.

Death and resurrection at work again! Does Paul lose out by not using the world’s approach? It might look like it at first glance, but look again! The Lord is using him in building the Church and, if we read on into **1 Corinthians 3**, we see that he is intent on building something that will survive the judgment of fire, built of materials that are created by God, not manufactured by human ingenuity.² Important lessons for all of us as we are **all** involved in seeing the Church built!

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and are also available at <https://justonecandle.substack.com>

¹ There is so much more to say about the Church! Maybe in some future studies . . .

² See *Out of the Ashes* via <https://www.justonecandle.uk/page4.html>