

# The Cross and the World (Continued)

by L.E. Maxwell

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*As Christians, we must be willing to stand out as sons of God in a crooked and perverse generation and to suffer persecution for our faith in order to have influence over the world.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 18:16, Matthew 5:14, John 7:7, John 17:6, John 17:11, John 17:14-15, John 17:18, Philippians 3:20, 2 Timothy 3:12

**Topics:** "Identity in Christ", "The Cross and the World"

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## Description

L.E. Maxwell emphasizes the transformative power of the Cross, illustrating how believers are rescued from the depths of the world and called to rescue others. He highlights the necessity of maintaining a clear distinction between the Christian and the world, asserting that true discipleship involves enduring the world's hatred and persecution. Maxwell warns against compromising with worldly values, which dulls the impact of the Gospel. He reflects on the early Christians' boldness and their refusal to conform to the world, which ultimately led to their profound influence. The sermon calls Christians to embrace their identity as citizens of Heaven and to shine as lights in a dark world.

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## Transcript

WAS ONCE DROWNING in the world's depths and condemnation. But "He sent from above, he took me; he drew me out of many waters." How deep were the seas into which the Savior sank--"All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me"--that He might "deliver (pluck out, rescue) us from this present evil world!" How wonderful our rescue! Further victory is needed, however, in getting the sea taken out of us. Yet it is crowning victory when those rescued plunge back into the sea to rescue other perishing ones. Even so. After the victory of being taken out of the world, and after the victory of having the foul elements of this world's darkness taken out of us, there is the crowning victory of getting us sent into that very world to rescue other perishing ones from the world's doom.

However, in re-entering this present evil world, it is imperative that our relationship to that world be kept crystal clear before us. Having been born from above, our citizenship is in Heaven. We have been "spiritually disfranchised of the world." Christ says plainly, "Ye are not of the world." We have been crucified to the world and the world unto us. And how great the moral distance between the crucified disciple and the crucified world? As far asunder as the throne of Heaven is from the gate of hell, and as different in disposition as "lambs in the midst of wolves." With what bold and daring contrast we are to stand out as sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom we are to shine

as lights in the world!

In John 17 Jesus sets forth the Christian's position as taken out of the world (v. 6), not of the world (v. 14), kept from the evil of the world (v. 15), left in the world (v. 11), sent into the world to preach to the world (vv. 18, 20), and as a result hated by the world (v. 14). Since our message centers around the world's attitude to the Cross, this last point is important.

Settle it in your mind, O Christian, that "because they (ye) are not of the world," therefore the world hateth you. Minimize not the world's hatred of the truth. The world that crucified Christ will not be able to tolerate you. The worldlings will clash madly against you. The reproach of Christ will fall upon you from all quarters. Think it not strange. It is a mark of true discipleship. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Let no one think that we write as one who has any "morbid greed for persecution," or that we hold any brief for a self-made martyrdom. Perish all such contemptible hypocrisy! But, without contradiction, the only reason the scandal of the Cross has ceased for some professed disciples is that they have become so compromising that the world is no longer rebuked by their lives or testimony. The Church and the world, like Samson and Delilah, are found in an unhallowed and foul fellowship.

And they of the Church, and they of the World, Journeyed closely, hand and heart, And none but the Master, who knoweth all, Could discern the two apart. One of the most searching and condemning sentences which ever fell from the Savior's lips was that uttered to His own unbelieving brethren: "The world cannot hate you" (John 7:7). If ever I become so one with the world, so tolerant of its spirit and atmosphere that I reprove it no more, incur not its hatred, rouse not its enmity to Christ--if the world can find in me no cause to hate me and cast me from its company, then I have betrayed Christ and crucified Him afresh in the house of His friends.

On intimate terms with this world that nailed Him to the tree? Perish the thought! In full identification with Christ the world can regard me as only fit for crucifixion. And as a disciple of Christ I should no more covet the favor of this crucified world than I would court and covet the smile of a cursed and crucified and expiring felon. It is the first condition of our initiation into the secret society of the Friends of God, that we take our place with Him before the judgment seat of the world; and arc with Him mocked, patronized, and misunderstood by the world's religion, the world's culture, the world's power--all the artificial contrivances that it sets up as standards by which to condemn Reality.

In the very moment in which we declare that it cannot give us that intangible Kingdom to which we aspire, we alienate its sympathy, insult its common sense. It goes up into the judgment seat, prepared to deal wisely with the rebel in us, tolerantly with the fool. Then ignorance, idleness, and cowardice condemn us at their ease. (Quoted from James Cordilier by S. M. Zwemcr in *The Glory of the Cross*.) One of the teachers of the past generation who had an unusually clear conception of the Christian's place in the world was Dr.

A. J. Gordon. He once said: The men who conquered the Roman Empire for Christ bore the aspect of invaders from another world, who absolutely refused to be naturalized to this world. Their conduct filled their heathen neighbors with the strangest perplexity; they were so care-less of life, so careful of conscience, so prodigal of their own blood, so confident of the overcoming power of the blood of the Lamb, so unsubdued to the custom of the country in which they sojourned, so mindful of the manners of that country from whence they came not.

The help of the world, the patronage of its rulers, the loan of its resources, the use of its methods they utterly refused, lest by employing these they might compromise their King. An invading army maintained from an invisible base, and placing more confidence in the leadership of an unseen Commander than in all imperial help that might be proffered--that was what so bewildered and angered the heathen, who often desire to make friends with the Christians without abandoning their own gods.

But there can be no reasonable doubt that that age in which the church was so completely separated from the world was the age in which Christianity was most victorious in the world. Professor H. B. Workman has summarized the Christian's lot under imperial Rome: For two hundred years to become a Christian meant the great renunciation, the joining a despised and persecuted sect, the swimming against the tide of popular prejudice, the coming under the ban of the Empire, the possibility at any moment of imprisonment and death under its most fearful forms.

For two hundred years he that would follow Christ must count the cost, and be prepared to pay the same with his liberty and life. For two hundred years the mere profession of Christianity was itself a crime. Christianus sum was almost the one plea for which there was no forgiveness, in itself all that was necessary as a "title" on the back of the condemned. He who made it was allowed neither to present apology nor to call in the aid of a pleader. "Public hatred," writes Tertullian, "asks but one thing, and that not investigation into the crime charges, but simply the confession of the Christian name.

So to the wild wolf Hate were sacrificed The panting, huddling Rock, whose crime was Christ. The Romans, Greeks, or Gentiles were indifferently called "the first race." The Jews, admittedly different, were known as "the second race." But the Christians, so peculiarly "disfranchised of the world," so intolerant of the world's spirit and atmosphere, and standing out in such bold contrast and daring unworldliness, were stigmatized "the third race." The Christians willingly embraced the stigma.

Anything was better than sin. Let the heathen rave. Christians belonged to another world. They were "dead to all the globe"--out of joint with all the world. Thus the cry in the circus of Carthage: "How long must we endure this third race?" The results of such an uncompromising victorious testimony were inevitable. The church of today cannot endure the blaze kindled by those martyr fires. Such "burning and shining lights" discover to us how distant is our departure from the Crucified.

Mark well, O popular Christian and worldly-wise preacher, venturing how far you must go with the world in order to win the world: never had the Church so much influence over the world as when she had nothing to do with the world. Completely separated from that Roman world, those early Christians plunged back into that sunken Empire to lift it off its hinges and change the entire course of the world's history. But in speaking of those early days, Tertullian wrote: "We engage in these conflicts as men whose very lives are not our own."

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