
ART. VIII.—BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD.

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Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead ; if the dead rise not at all ? why are they then baptized for the dead ?—1 COR. XV. 29.

ON reading this, one naturally asks, "What does the apostle mean by it?" That he intends it as an argument in favor of the doctrine of the resurrection, is plain enough. But what is the meaning of the words rendered, "baptized for the dead?" Says Dr. Bloomfield, in his note on the passage, "If we were to judge of the difficulty of the passage from the variety of interpretations, we should say that this is the most obscure and least understood passage in the New Testament." Of the interpretations that have been given, some are destitute of philo-

logical support; while others, if not wanting in this respect, involve very far-fetched and inadmissible allusions—savor too strongly of superstition—or are neither agreeable to the context nor pertinent to the apostle's argument. To us, all are more or less unsatisfactory.

The main thing, we conceive, necessary to a clear and correct understanding of these words, is, not philological learning and critical acumen in distinguishing nice shades of difference in meaning of the words of a dead language, so much as a knowledge of apostolic Christianity, and principles and practice, and looking at the passage in the light of that knowledge. Doing this, we shall find, as we think, but little, if any, difficulty in coming at the apostle's meaning.

Leaving, then, the 19th century, and going back 1800 years to the year of our Lord 56 or 57, the time when this epistle was written,—leaving behind us the clouds that overhung the church during the middle ages, and whose skirts still hover over us and around us,—and going up to the apostles' times, with the word of God in our hands, let us ask, what was then the true idea of a Christian?

Says the Saviour, "Whosoever will come after me," i. e., be a Christian, "let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." Mark viii. 34, 35. Again: "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal." John xii. 25. That is to say, he that is anxious to secure and enjoy the comforts of this life, and makes this the object of his daily aims and efforts, will lose eternal life; whereas, he that gives up or risks the comforts of this life, and life itself, for Christ's sake, shall find, beyond the grave, a life that far more than compensates for what he abandons his hold upon here. A Christian, then, according to the Saviour's idea of a Christian, is one who has let go his hold upon this life, and laid hold on eternal life in the exercise of an unwavering faith in Christ crucified and risen. He is one who is dead to this world, though living for another.

This, too, was the apostle Paul's idea of a Christian. Hence he says to the Romans, xii. 1, "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living *sacrifice*, holy," &c. Regard your bodies, as long as you live, as something sacrificed to God, laid on the altar of his will to be consumed, if such be his will, by the flames of worldly trials, sufferings, persecutions and losses encountered for his sake.

Look upon yourselves as *sacrificed* for this life, dead alike to its charms and its menaces, and unsolicitous respecting mere worldly objects and bodily comforts. In his farewell address to the elders of the church at Ephesus, he says, Acts xx. 23, 24, "The Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city that bonds and afflictions abide me; but none of these things move me, neither count I my life *dear unto myself*, so that I might finish my course with joy," &c. To the Philippians, iii. 7, 8, he says, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things being made conformable unto his death." The prospects of worldly prosperity, distinction, ease and comfort that were before me—I have abandoned them all for Christ. And to the Galatians, ii. 20; he says, "I am crucified and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God," &c. This life of hardship, trial, persecution, and deadness to worldly comfort, I live in consequence of the faith I have in the Son of God, as one who loved me and gave himself for me. As a Christian, he ever speaks of himself as crucified—done with the pleasures and pursuits of the world. His hold on this life he abandoned the moment he laid hold by faith on Christ, and identified himself with Him, a *crucified* Saviour. Bodily, the apostle did not die, till he breathed his last; but virtually and to all real intents and purposes, he died years before, when he gave up the world and launched his all, for time as well as eternity, in faith, upon the crucified Jesus. A Christian, according to his idea, is not one who is clinging to the world, fearing to lose the comforts of life for Christ's sake, but one who has already given up this life for his Saviour's sake, and is as ready, if such be His will, to rest from his mortal labors to-day as fifty years hence. And this idea we see standing out in bold relief in that noble exhortation of his to the Colossians, iii. 2, 3, "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth; for ye are *dead*, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

This was a striking peculiarity of the early adherents of the crucified One; they themselves, were in a sense crucified and dead. They had given up this present life for Christ's sake, and by faith in him were living in expectation of another.

Now, this renunciation of the present life—this crucifixion to the world, is designed to be represented in the act of Christian baptism, as something done by every individual receiving the ordinance; his immersion in water expressing his giving