

# WE DIED IN BAPTISM

IN July 1971 S.S., pages 71-73 appeared an article "BAPTISM: In the Epistles of Paul". In the second paragraph, under the sub-head Romans 6:1-11, we stressed that in our baptism we *died to sin*, THAT WE WERE BAPTISED INTO CHRIST'S DEATH. Arising from those statements, although agreeing with them, a correspondent thinks they may be misunderstood unless further enlightenment were given. The writer says:

"I wonder if you would expound a little more on the statement... 'How can we who have died to sin live any longer therein?' i.e. Baptism was our dying to sin. Is it possible that some readers may get the idea that we cannot sin? It is the word 'death' - in what sense? Is it that a dead person cannot be active in committing sin?"

We appreciate the letter and the reasons given for its having been written. We can so easily take it for granted that our hearers or readers have only to have Bible truths stated to them, without explanation, to grasp their meaning. This teaching of having died to sin when we were baptised is so vital that our understanding of it will completely revolutionise our lives as Christians. Hence it is absolutely essential that we grasp its meaning.

## Does it mean that a Christian cannot sin?

There are some who claim this. The doctrine is based upon the statement in 1 John 3:6-9, which says: "No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him... No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God." But if the passage means that the Christian *cannot* sin, it is a direct contradiction of what the same writer has said earlier in his epistle (1:8-10) - "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned we make him a liar and the truth is not in us."

No writer, especially of the scriptures, could be guilty of two such completely contradictory statements, if we accept the belief that a Christian *cannot* sin. Accepting that, one or other statement is untrue. We believe that both are true. In the former passage John says that a Christian *can* and *does* sin; but he shows the way of forgiveness if and when we do - confession of our sin to God. How can the same

writer cancel out this way of forgiveness by stating in the second passage (3rd chapter) that it is impossible to sin, and that therefore no forgiveness is necessary? Now much of the New Testament written to Christians warns and exhorts us not to sin, and sets before us the holy way of life we are to live. No such warnings or exhortations are needed if, after all, sin cannot touch us.

But what does this second passage mean? The note on the passage in the Rev. Standard Version *Study Bible* is clear and succinct: "From the Greek tenses used here in 3:9 the verse might well be paraphrased, 'Whoever is born of God does not make sin the *practice* of his life.' So while believers do sin, it is not their common custom nor are they confirmed in the direction of sin, for their nature is no longer the old sinful nature, but one given by God. The thought is expressed further in 5:18: a child of God does not live a life of sin because the Son of God keeps him."

To the Christian sin is not an accepted way of life. When he sins he knows it: his conscience, his whole being protests against it. He knows that in the sinning he is not acting and living worthily of Christ, and that he must not act so again. He knows, too, that the way to renewal of holiness and strength lies in his confession to God through Jesus Christ. But each time he yields to temptation he becomes weaker, for he is more and more stifling and silencing his protesting conscience. If persisted in, to continue sinning will issue in his conscience ceasing to protest and his becoming "dead *in* sin" (Eph.2:1). That is the awful state depicted in 1 Tim.4:2, where Paul speaks of the one whose "conscience is seared", branded, made without feeling.

In Romans 6:2 the Christian is declared to be "Dead to sin". That death occurred in his baptism: indeed the very act depicts death, burial and rising again. Whether the Christian realises it or not this new state, new outlook, new relationship came about through baptism. To keep him from sinning Paul reminds the Christian of his "death to sin" by pointing him back to what took place in that event and act. Ideally sin must have no more effect in and power over the Christian than anything that takes place is noticed by those who are dead.

What really does this mean? This is one of the scriptures where Commentaries prove of help to us. We give some brief selections from their expositions:— F.F. BRUCE: PARAPHRASE OF THE EPISTLES OF PAUL: "We died as far as our relation with sin is concerned; how can we go on living in sin?"

C.K. BARRETT: EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS: "We, who in our essential nature, *i.e.* just because we are Christians, died. We cannot as Christians go on living in sin because, as Christians, we have died to sin, as far as sin is concerned we are dead. The definite past tense, 'we died' points to a particular moment; conversion and (as the next verse shows) baptism, must be in mind."

SANDAY: ROMANS (Internat. Critical Comm.): "we being what we are, men who (in our baptism) died to sin."

"When we took the decisive step and became Christians, we may be said to have died to sin in such a way as to make it flat contradiction to live any longer in it."

ELLCOTT: BIBLE COMMENTARY: Rom. 6:2: "We that are dead.—Rather, *that died*... Paul regards this change — from sin to righteousness, from bondage to freedom, from death to life — as summed up in one definite act of the past... to each individual man when he accepts Christ, is baptised into Christ. Then... he dies once for all to sin, he lives henceforth for ever to God. ...An entire change came over them when they became Christians — they are not, and cannot be, their former selves... it is a contradiction of their very being to sin any more..."

The above are typical of many other commentaries we have consulted on this text. Some are compiled by Anglicans, Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans. But whatever their religious persuasions, although most of them are infant-sprinklers, they unite in showing from scripture the vital importance of baptism, its significance and meaning, and that these lessons are conveyed only through that baptism taught and practised by Christ and His apostles, and so clearly set forth in the New Testament — immersion. No other "form of baptism" contains or can convey these lessons.

EDITOR