

DEATH AND AFTER

The False Teachings on Future Punishment (Continued)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The Christian faith is under attack in our day and one of the devil's darts is aimed at the Biblical teaching of eternal punishment. Without the concept of eternal punishment, there is no glorious gospel of Christ and Christianity is just another works system religion.
- B. Christians must know the error the cultists and modernists are teaching today that they might be able to stand firm for the true Christian faith as it is found in the Bible and as it has been held by the historic Christian Church.

II. SECOND PROBATION (Second Chance to Be Saved)

- A. Position: This theory teaches that salvation through Christ is still possible after death in the intermediate state for certain classes of people or perhaps for all. This second chance is offered on the same terms as in this present life, faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour. Some second probationists limit the offer to all who die in infancy and to all adult heathen who in this life did not hear the gospel. Others extend the second chance to all men in general. Depending on how a second probationist views eternal punishment, if one, when given a second chance once or more times, obstinately refuses then he may be punished in eternal hell or annihilated, or he may be kept in some form of temporary punishment until he does repent.
- B. Proponents: In the early church only Origen and a few mystics held this view. At the time of the Reformation some Anabaptists held a form of second chance theology. In the 19th century, this view became popular among the modernists. In the 20th century, all liberals and some neo-orthodox theologians held this view and it is openly espoused in many denominational churches. The Jehovah Witnesses cult also holds a form of second chance to be saved.

“During the Millennium the wicked will have a second chance, but if they show no marked improvement during the first hundred years, they will be annihilated. If in that period they give evidence of some amendment of life, their probation will continue, but only to end in annihilation, if they remain impenitent. There is no hell, no place of eternal torment.” (Beottner, Immortality)

- C. Support: Second chance advocates support their view more from human reason and sentimentality than on any direct teaching of Scripture. They hold that God is totally love and must act consistently with His nature. They forget that God is also wrath, justice, righteousness and holy, and has a plan for this world which ends at death for men.
 - 1. Christ Descended Into Hell: They believe that Christ descended into hell at His death and declared His death to men who had rejected Him (I Pet. 3:18-

20) and set them free (Eph. 4:8). OBJECTIONS: (1) These verses are open to much interpretation and it is impossible to be dogmatic that Christ descended into hell; (2) If Christ did descend into hell (Hades) – I believe He did – He did not release unsaved men but merely made their misery more miserable by His declaration; (3) If Christ did give men a second chance in hell when He descended, that could only apply to people before the cross and not after.

2. Unbelief is the Only Ground of Condemnation: They believe that men can only be condemned on the basis of rejection of Christ and this would eliminate infants who die and heathen who have never heard (Jn. 3:16, 3:36; Rom. 10:9-12). God would not be just in condemning men unless all men had a chance to hear the gospel of Christ and reject it. OBJECTIONS: (1) The Bible clearly teaches that men are condemned because they are sinners by imputation, by nature and by acts and are condemned by a holy God whether they have heard the gospel or not (Rom. 5:12-21). Men are sinners because they are in Adam; they have original sin and God must judge them; (2) Acceptance of Christ is the only ground for salvation but not the only ground for condemnation (Jn. 3:16); (3) Men are condemned already before they ever believe in Christ (Jn. 3:18, 19).

D. Biblical and Logical Objections

1. The Bible teaches the state of unbelievers after death is a fixed state (Lk. 16:19-31). A person's decision in time concerning Christ settles forever his eternal destiny.
2. The Bible teaches us that Gentiles who never heard, perish (Rom. 1:32; 2:12). We can apply this over to heathen today who have never heard.
3. The Bible teaches just one life and death and then a judgment, never giving even a hint of a second chance (Heb. 9:27; Jn. 8:24; II Cor. 6:2).
4. The Bible nowhere gives any hope for children of unsaved parents who die in infancy. The Bible does have something to say about covenant children of believing parents who die in infancy.
5. The second chance theory destroys any real missionary zeal because most people, if not all, will obviously believe if given a second chance. NOTE: Only those who respond in faith to Jesus Christ in this life shall have eternal life in heaven. All others will perish in their sins.

III. BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD

- A. Position: This theory teaches that people who have died without being baptized can have true believers be baptized for them. Those who believe in baptism for the dead believe also that water baptism is necessary to salvation. NOTE: Baptism for the dead is practiced by the Mormons who by a substitutionary baptism in the temple on behalf of dead relatives can deliver their spirits from the "prison house" (temporary place of punishment for unbelievers).

Millions of earth's sons and daughters have passed out of the body without obeying the law of baptism. Many of them will gladly accept the word and law of the Lord when it is proclaimed to them in the spirit world. But they cannot there attend to ordinances that belong to the sphere which they have left. Can nothing be done in their case? Must they forever be shut out of the

kingdom of heaven? Both justice and mercy join in answering “yes” to the first, “no” to the last question. When, then, is the way of their deliverance?

The living may be baptized for the dead. Other essential ordinances may be attended to vicariously. This glorious truth, hid from human knowledge for centuries, has been made known in this greatest of all divine dispensations . . . It gives men and women the power to become “Saviours on Mount Zion,” Jesus being the great Captain in the army of redeemers.” (C. Penrose, Mormon Doctrine)

- B. Support: There is only one verse in the whole Bible to support baptism for the dead (I Cor. 15:29) which says, “Otherwise what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?”
- OBJECTIONS: (1) Baptism for the dead is based on baptismal regeneration which is against Paul’s viewpoint of salvation (I Cor. 1:17); (2) In the second century, baptism for the unsaved was practiced by the Marcionites and others and was condemned; (3) There is no other mention of the baptism of the dead in the whole Bible.
- C. Possible Interpretations of First Corinthians 15:29: No one can be sure of the interpretations. There are at least forty possible explanations. Some of them are as follows:
1. Baptism for dead believers who were never baptized. A literal water baptism for friends, relatives or martyrs who died without receiving baptism.
 2. Baptized with a view to the resurrection of the dead; that is with the assurance that the dead will be raised.
 3. Baptized over the dead. Sometimes, for the sake of expressing their faith in the resurrection, Christians are said to have been baptized over the graves of martyrs.
 4. Baptism on the testimony of someone who died. You give me a testimony, you die, later I remember that testimony, get saved and get baptized.
 5. Baptism of young converts who fill up the ranks of older saints who died.
 6. CONCLUSION: My interpretation of this difficult verse is that there was definitely a ritual going on in Corinth among some who were practicing some form of substitutionary baptism for the dead. They had foolishly undertaken to be baptized on behalf of some of their friends who had died without baptism. Possibly, there had entered into their mind that if a man believed and yet had not been baptized that he would be lost; therefore, it was necessary for someone to be baptized in their place. NOTE: This was wrong thinking and practice and the Apostle Paul separates himself from those who were practicing the ritual. He says, “what shall those do” so as to contrast them with the “we” of the next verse (I Cor. 15:30). The tone of the verse indicates that Paul is not for the ritual. He does not believe in it but he does not refute it either. As a matter of fact, Paul uses it to enforce his argument. He is attempting to prove the importance of resurrection of the body from the dead, and he uses this local ritual to show that even their weird practices of baptism of the dead show they believe in some kind of future resurrection. Paul’s point is to get across the concept of resurrection. He does not want to become involved in a theological argument at this point over the validity of the practice of the baptism for the dead. NOTE: We

must remember that the Corinthians were “carnal” and were liable to fall into all kinds of strange doctrines and practices.