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'YOUR CHILDREN HOLY.'

OR

WERE INFANTS BAPTIZED IN
APOSTLES' DAYS?

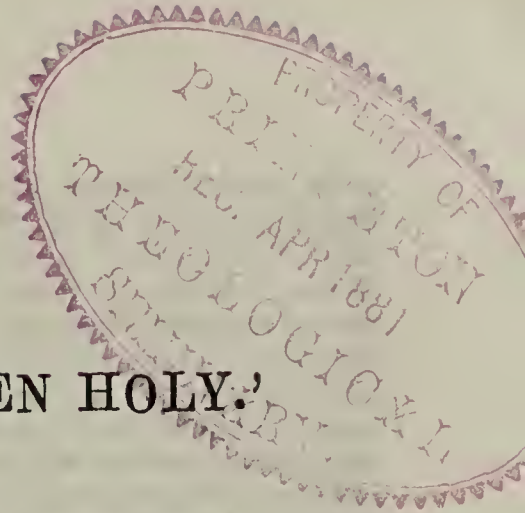
by

Mr. R. Govett.

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'YOUR CHILDREN HOLY.'

A READER conversant with Holy Scripture will at once understand from the title, that this tract is engaged with the well known passage in the first Epistle to the Corinthians.

1 COR. vii, 12—14.

“If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.

“And the woman that hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

“For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean, but now are they holy.”

The difficulty of this text has been felt by many. Pædo-baptists claim it as establishing infant baptism. “How strongly this supports the doctrine of Pædo-baptism, is manifest,” says the learned Dr. Bloomfield.

And Neal relates, that the powerful Baptist controversialist, Mr. Tombes, “so early as the year 1627 being led in the course of his lectures to discuss the subject of baptism, was brought into doubt concerning the authority for that of infants, *which for some years he continued to practise only on the ground of the Apostle's words, 1 Cor. vii, 14.*” *History iv, 559.*

Baptists in general too, since that date, have not felt themselves at home upon the verse: the reason of which, I shall endeavour to show.

But let us hear the argument for infant baptism derived hence, as stated by Pædo-baptists.

EXTRACT FROM SCOTT.

“If this had not so been appointed, but Christians had been commanded to put away their unbelieving partners, as the Jews did their idolatrous wives, the children of such marriages would

have been accounted relatively unclean, and so excluded from baptism, as those of the Jews in the above-mentioned case were from circumcision: but on the contrary they were accounted holy in the Christian churches, and thus admitted among them as a part of the visible kingdom of God. This exposition of the Scripture before us has indeed been much controverted; and some have explained 'holy' or 'unclean' to mean 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate,' but in all the places where these words are found in Scripture, there is not one that will fairly admit of this sense. No doubt the children of heathens who were lawfully married, were as legitimate as those of Christians, yet they are never said to be 'holy.' Something more must be meant by the believer sanctifying the unbelieving party, than merely legalizing their marriage; for that would have been the case had both been unbelievers; and the children would not *really* be more *holy* in respect of their nature if one parent was a believer, than if both were unbelievers. But as the word 'unclean' is frequently used in a relative sense, denoting '*unfit to be admitted to God's ordinances,*' and 'holy' the contrary: as in this sense the male children of the Jews were *holy*, and so partakers of circumcision: while those of the Gentiles, and even such as had one idolatrous parent, were unclean and excluded from circumcision: so I cannot but conclude, after long attention to the subject, that the baptism of the infant offspring of Christians is here referred to, as at that time customary in the churches; and that the Corinthians knew that this was not objected to, when only one parent was a Christian. 'Hence then the argument for infant baptism runs thus. If the holy seed among the Jews was therefore to be circumcised, and to be *made federally* holy, by receiving the sign of the covenant, and being admitted into the number of God's holy people, because they were born in sanctity, or were *seminally* holy for 'the root being holy, so are the branches also:' then by like reason, the holy seed of Christians ought to be admitted to baptism and receive the sign of the Christian covenant, 'the laver of regeneration,' and so be entered into the society of the Christian church.'"—*Whitby*.

EXTRACT FROM DODDRIDGE.

"For in such a case as this, *the unbelieving husband is so sanctified to the wife, and the unbelieving wife is so sanctified to the husband,* that their matrimonial converse is as lawful as if they were both of the same faith: *otherwise your children, in these mixed cases, were unclean,* and must be looked upon as unfit to be admitted to those peculiar ordinances by which the seed of God's people are distinguished; *but now they are confessedly holy,* and are as readily admitted to baptism in all our churches, as if both the parents were Christians: so that the case, you see, is in effect decided by this prevailing practice."

"*Now are they holy.*"—On the maturest and most impartial consideration of the text, I must judge it to refer to *infant baptism*.

Nothing can be more apparent than that the word *holy* signifies, persons who might be admitted to partake of the distinguishing rites of God's people. Compare Exod. xix, 6; Deut. vii, 6; xiv, 2; xxvi, 19; xxxiii, 3; Ezek. ix, 2, with Isa. xxxv, 8; lii, 1; Acts x, 28, &c. And as for the interpretation which so many of our brethren, the Baptists, have contended for, that *holy* signifies *legitimate*, and *unclean*, *illegitimate*, (not to urge that this seems an unscriptural sense of the word,) nothing can be more evident, than that the argument will by no means bear it; for it would be proving a thing by itself, *idem per idem*, to argue that the converse of the parents was lawful, because the children were not bastards: whereas all who thought the converse of the parents unlawful, must of course think that the children were illegitimate."

Barnes gives up the argument for infant baptism from this place: nor does Matthew Henry plead for Pædo-baptism from the passage.

Let us then consider—Does the passage establish the baptism of infants in apostolic times?

I. First, be it observed, *two principles* are admitted on both sides as fundamental.

1. CHRISTIANS OF PRESENT TIMES OUGHT TO FOLLOW THE PRACTICES WHICH WERE ESTABLISHED AND SANCTIONED BY THE APOSTLES.

2. NO ADULT UNBELIEVER OR HEATHEN OUGHT TO BE BAPTIZED: NOR WAS HE BAPTIZED IN APOSTOLIC CHURCHES.

II. Secondly, let us inquire what was the *point in question* between the apostle and the Corinthian church?

It appears from the first verse of the chapter, that the Corinthian believers wrote to desire the apostle's decision upon certain practical points: 1 Cor. vii, 1.

Of these, the one before us was a scruple, *whether it was lawful for a believing husband or wife to live with an unbelieving partner?* Ezra had required the Jewish husbands to put away their heathen wives: Ezra x, 2—5. Did the same law hold among Christians?

To settle this, then, is the apostle's intent in the words cited.

But in interpreting the 14th verse two main difficulties meet us.

I. The nature of the holiness spoken of.

II. The gist of the argument used by the apostle.

Let us discuss these questions in order. That we may enter upon it the better, I would offer a translation of the passage more exact than that of our version.

14. "For the unbelieving husband *hath been* made holy in the wife, and the unbelieving wife *hath been* made holy in the husband : since if so * your children are unclean, but now are they holy."

I. THE NATURE OF THE HOLINESS.

Of what kind is the holiness spoken of ?

1. Holiness is *real* or *spiritual*, when there is the renewal of the heart before God. This, it is granted, was not possessed by the heathen husband, or by the children generally. They were therefore not holy *before God*, nor pleasing to him : Heb. xi, 6 ; Rom. viii, 8 ; John iii, 36.

2. But some contend for a ceremonial holiness, like that possessed by the Jewish people. And herein *opinion* is again divided. (1.) One party would make it a holiness by nature or by birth, giving a right to the reception of baptism. (2.) The other would affirm it to be holiness acquired by actual reception of baptism. The Church of England asserts all to be unholy before baptism. Hence she rightly disowns any holiness of *nature* or birth, as giving a ground for baptism ; and the idea is refuted in this verse.

But (i.) If the holiness arose from *baptism actually received*, then a distinction must have been set up between the children *baptized* and those *not so*. It would have been said, that they were *made* holy, like the wife. But now it is said "they *are* holy." *All* were holy *in the same sense*.

(ii.) This idea disturbs the equality of standing between them and the heathen wife. The same holiness belongs to both ; yet the one party is unbaptized, the other baptized.

(iii.) If the children spoken of were holy by baptism, then unbaptized children ought not to live with their

* If the husband and wife are to separate.

parents, for they are unclean. And where a heathen was father, or the children were adult, many were doubtless unbaptized.

(iv.) If it admits to baptism, it will admit also to the Supper of the Lord.

(i.) Nor is it holiness of *nature or of birth*: for all alike are “by nature the children of wrath,” Eph. ii, 3.

(ii.) Again, it would overthrow one of our fundamental principles. If, on the footing of this holiness, the children ought to be, and were baptized, the heathen husband or wife ought to be and was baptized also. But this, it is granted, was not so, nor ought to be.

(iii.) Further, this holiness would admit to baptism not only *infants* of a believing parent, but adult unbelieving children also. For the holiness attaches to the children universally, whether infant or adult

3. Others, both of Baptist and Pædo-baptist views, contend for a *civil* holiness. As though the apostle had said—‘Your marriage is legal, else your children are illegitimate. But you esteem your children legitimate, and they are so; therefore the marriage is binding and legal.’

But this argument labours under two defects; one *logical*, and one *moral*.

1. As Doddridge observes, it is a proving a doubted point by the same point of doubtfulness. For he who doubted whether the *original* relation of the marriage were lawful, would doubt also of the *derived* relation of the children of such marriage.

Ezra when he bade Israel put away their heathen *wives*, required also the putting away of the *children* born of them: Ezra x, 3.

Booth, indeed, endeavours to get rid of this objection by saying, that Doddridge’s argument is founded on a mistake. He would state it as follows—“The children are legitimate, because the converse of the parents is lawful; and that converse is lawful because they have been sanctified, or mutually set apart for the enjoyment of each other, exclusively of all other persons”—*Pædo-baptism Examined*, ii. 220.

But this is not correct. The point to be proved was the lawfulness of the married living together, not the legitimacy of the children. 'Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy,' is the result of a previous premise regarding the lawfulness of their living together. Besides, his argument labours under a mistake soon to be set forth.

2. It has also a *moral* flaw.* It would prove no satisfaction to the questioner. "Am *I right before God* in living with a heathen wife?" is the inquiry.—To this it is no sufficient answer to reply—"Yes, you are right according to *human laws*, your marriage is legal, your children legitimate." 'I know that,' would be the speedy rejoinder: 'so were the Jewish marriages legal according to Persian laws. But the wives and children must both be put away as unlawful *before God*.'

3. Some have supposed the holiness to consist in the *hopefulness of the conversion of the wife* and children under such circumstances. (1.) But that could not pacify the inquiring conscience as to the lawfulness of the relation at that time. Here nothing would avail but to point out that the position at that time, and under all possible events, was right. (2.) The sanctification is spoken of, not, as yet possibly future, but as actually possessed. "The wife *has been* sanctified."—*ἡγιασται*. "Your children *are* holy," *ἔστι*.

4. There remains yet a sense which directly satisfies the question, and accords with scriptural usage. The husband's living with his heathen wife was *lawful before God*. She was not unclean, she was *made holy to him*. It is a holiness regarding certain persons, which gives the privilege of living with them. It is not sanctification by the renewing of the mind, nor by the Holy Ghost, but "by the husband." The scruple arose from perceiving, that the unbelieving wife was unholy and spiritually unclean before God. The answer to the scruple is, that though spiritually unclean before God, she was yet clean to the believer. The

* Logically, it would be *ignoratio elenchi*.

unbelieving wife communicated no spiritual defilement to the believing husband, nor need there be any conscientious scruple because of their living together, for the Lord permitted it. The 'holiness' then or 'cleanness' respects the party making the inquiry.

The interchange of the words 'unclean' and 'holy,' shows in what sense each is to be taken. Holiness in the sense supposed, belongs even to things *inanimate*. The believer's food is "*sanctified*," or "*made holy* by the word of God and prayer:" 1 Tim. iv, 5. "Give alms of such things as ye have, and behold, all things are *clean* unto you:" Luke xi, 41. In the passage from Timothy the same point is in question. Were certain kinds of food *lawful to the believer?* or did they defile him? The answer to this difficulty is the same. Every kind of food is lawful, and may be used without any trouble of conscience, for it is made holy by prayer.

The expressions used then concerning the unbelieving wife is paralleled by that of the believer's food. She may be lived with without defilement of soul or body, even as all kinds of food may be eaten. "I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing *unclean* of itself, but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, *to him* it is *unclean*:" Rom. xiv, 14.

The question of the Christian husband was, 'Is my heathen wife holy *to me*?' The answer is, 'She was sanctified or made holy to you by marriage.' It is not said, that she was holy in herself, or made holy *towards God*; she could not be, as long as she was heathen. The two were "one flesh," and her flesh was *holy* or *clean* to him.

The sense of 'holy' is fixed in this case, by the word 'unclean.' When a word is employed of several different meanings, it may, in some cases, be difficult to decide which is the sense designed. "Sweet" is the opposite of "bitter," and of "sour" among tastes: it is the opposite also to "harsh," among sounds. If then we heard only the words—"This is sweet," we

might doubt in what sense it was to be taken. But if the speaker said—‘This is *sweet*, but if kept long it will turn *sour*,’ we should know that the person was speaking of tastes, and that he meant the opposite of ‘*sour*.’

So here the word ‘unclean’ decides the sense of ‘holy.’ “Your children were *unclean*, but now are they *holy*.” ‘Holy,’ then, means, ‘not unclean.’ “Your children else were *unclean*, but now are they *not unclean*.” Attempt to elevate ‘holy’ beyond its due place, and its antagonist in the other scale witnesses against the error. Depress ‘holy’ from its loftiest sense, and you are sustained by the word in the other scale.

II. We come now to consider the second difficulty.

THE GIST OF THE APOSTLE’S ARGUMENT.

This is equivalent to the inquiry—Who are the PARTIES ADDRESSED in the words, “Else were *your* children unclean?”

1. It has hitherto been universally assumed, that the apostle is speaking to *the mixed couples* concerning children.

(1.) “Otherwise your children *in these mixed cases* were unclean,” says Doddridge.

(2.) “The children of *such marriages*,” says Scott, “would have been accounted relatively unclean.”

(3.) From this it would follow that the offspring of *such a marriage*, would be illegitimate,” says Barnes.

(4.) “For otherwise, (namely, *if one party be not sanctified*,) your children would be considered impure and profane. But *now* (that is, in this case,) they are holy.”—*Bloomfield*.

Here lurked the unnoticed fallacy, from which arose the difficulty of seeing the force of the apostle’s argument.

It followed as a necessary result, that Paul was arguing only as to the lawfulness of the mixed marriages in question. But the force of such an argument is null: as has been shewn. If the lawfulness of the marriage were doubtful, the position of the children who were the result of it, was equally doubtful. The

legitimacy in human law of the children born under such circumstances, could not decide anything as to the question raised.

1. If Paul had intended to speak of the children of such mixed marriages, he would have used another relative. He would have said—"Else were *their* children unclean." So does Barnes when arguing on the subject.

"The connexion produces a species of sanctification, or diffuses a kind of holiness over the unbelieving party by the believing party, so far as to render *their* children holy." "The apostle was speaking of something *then*, and which rendered *their* children at that time holy." "If the connexion was to be regarded as impure and abominable, then *their* children were to be esteemed illegitimate and unclean." "They did not believe, and could not believe, that *their* children were defiled."*

These mixed marriages presented not the case of the church generally, but of exceptions only. He would have shown this then, by speaking of such exceptive cases in a way that evidenced that he was addressing the church generally about them. The word "your" supposes that he had before him the parties appealed to. But the unbeliever was not of the church, nor was he supposed to be present.

2. The apostle's actual use of the word "*your*," proves that he was speaking of the children of the Corinthian church generally, and, through that church, to all churches and believers. This will be apparent if we consider the phraseology natural to the case, and that which is constantly adopted by the apostle.

1. "Dare any of you having a matter against another go to law before the unjust and not before the saints:" vi, 1.

2. "Know ye not that *YOUR* bodies are members of Christ?" vi, 15. So 19, 20, and v, 6, &c.

Again in the chapter before us:—

3. "Now concerning the things, whereof *ye* wrote unto me."

* Once indeed Barnes addresses the mixed pair directly, and uses then the word "your." But Paul does not so. He does not address directly any but believers.

4. "Defraud *ye* * not one the other except it be with consent for a time, that *ye* may give *yourselves* to fasting and prayer and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for YOUR incontinency."

5. "And this I speak for YOUR own profit, not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, that *ye* may attend upon the Lord without distraction." 35.

It was the church at Corinth which wrote to him. To *them* he addresses his reply.

Further, does the apostle, by the word "your", mean only the children of such mixed marriages? Then confine it to that case! Why do you apply it to the children of *believing parents in general*? To them it does not directly apply. On such a view Paul says only, "the children of *such mixed marriages* are not unclean, but holy." Before the sentiment can apply to the children of Christian parents generally, there must be a further inference,—'And if the children of *such exceptive* cases be not unclean, much more must the children of families where *both* the parents are believers, be holy.' On this supposition only, have the words a general bearing.

But this general bearing is universally *assumed* by those, who nevertheless apply the passage, as if Paul spoke directly † of the whole church. They argue in

* The italics mark the cases when the person is only contained in the form of a verb: the capitals, when the relative is expressed. This explanation was first given by Hinton, of America.

† I propose a slight variation in the rendering of *επει απα—εστι*. The established version renders, 'Else were.'—That is, "Because if *not*, your children *would be*." But there is no negative in the apostle's expressions, nor is the verb in the subjunctive. It should be, 'Since—if so—your children *are* unclean, but now are they holy.'

The second inferential particle (*απα*) takes up the consequence of *their* supposition, not of the *apostle's*. If their principle of separation was good, the children of church members were unclean to their parents. Our translators suppose the apostle to be arguing from the contrary to his own conclusion. This requires "not" to be introduced, either openly, or covertly, as in 'else.' But *επει απα* means, 'Since, if so.' Take a case—'Since, *if so* (if you are forbidden to keep company with fornicators) you must go out of the world: 1 Cor. v, 10. Or, as our authorized version has it—"For *then* ye must needs," &c.

relation to the apostle's reasoning, as though the children of the *mixed* marriages alone were intended. But when they apply it to the subject of infant baptism, they take "your children" as embracing *all believers*.

The expression then should be taken generally in both aspects. The words "your children," both in the immediate connexion and in the argument for infant baptism, have *one* meaning; and that its most general one. They, mean the children of the whole church, whether infants or adults. The holiness here supposed belonged to all alike.

See now, with this connection, how the argument clears up and becomes wholly luminous. The apostle bids them trace out the results of the principle in question.

He says in effect, 'Look at the consequences of your principle. If the believing husband is not to live with his heathen wife, *because she is an unbeliever and therefore unclean*, the connexion between Christian parents and *their children* must be broken also; for *all children are born unbelieving and are therefore unclean*. But you see that this result of the principle is unnatural and terrible. So then is the other and more limited one. Children, though unbelievers, are not unclean to *their parents*. They communicate no defilement to them: their society is perfectly lawful, or sanctified by God. "But *now** are they holy." Is it lawful for a believer to live with a heathen wife? Yes, as lawful as for believing *parents* to live with unbelieving *children*.'

The holiness in question then in both cases, relates solely to the lawfulness of living together, both as it regards the wife with the husband, and the children, with their parents. 'It is God's will that they should *dwell with you*, and their *bodies* communicate no defilement. But unless their *souls* be made holy, they will never *dwell with God*.' Both were alike unclean before

* 'Now,' is here, not a particle of time, but of inference. As in John xv, 22, 24; xviii, 36, where it stands as the apodosis to 'if.'

God, and before the church, which, as an assembly of believers, upholds both in theory and practice, God's views of holiness. Both were alike *clean* in the relations of the flesh. If baptism belongs not to the *original* relation of husband and wife, who before God are one flesh : neither does it belong to the *derivative* relation of child to parent, which again is only a relationship of the flesh.

This inspired argument then places the *unbelieving wife* on the same level with *the children of believers*. It is what logicians call an argument *a pari*, or from one case to another like it on principle. IF SO, THEN NO UNBELIEVING CHILDREN, EVEN OF BELIEVING PARENTS, WERE BAPTIZED IN PAUL'S DAY. Corinth though unsound on many points, was sound here, both in theory and practice ; else reproof and instruction would have come in.

The heathen wife was not baptized. This is granted. Or, if any deny it and outrage our first principles of faith, we can prove it. If she had been baptized, she would have been received into the church. And if so, the scruple of conscience before us could not have arisen. And if *she* was not baptized, neither were the infant children of the Corinthian church. For if so, they and the unbelieving wife were *not* on a level, as the argument assumes they were.

Imagine the apostle to be arguing with a church of modern Pædo-baptists, and this will fully appear. "If you bid, says he, the believing husband separate from his ungodly wife, you must also require pious parents to separate from their unbelieving children, upon the same principle." But he would at once be met by the reply—"The cases are not parallel : our children are in the covenant of grace, and are *baptized* members of the church of Christ. Therefore they do not stand on the same footing with the heathen wife, who has never been admitted within the Christian church." As then the apostle could not have used such an argument, if in his day, infants, (aye, and the infants of believing parents,) were baptized, it is clear THAT NONE WERE.

Paul knew no difference before God between adults and infants, save the one of faith, or unbelief. Without faith all of every age, are “by nature the children of wrath.”

But can no infant be saved then? Yes, but not by faith—and baptism is only to be administered to those, who not only believe, but give the answer of faith: 1 Pet. iii, 21. The children of believers, are, as truly as the children of unbelievers, “children of the flesh,” and such are *not* the children of God: Rom. ix, 8. No natural relationship or connexion in the flesh gave to any unbeliever a right to any ordinance, or a place in the church of Christ then, or can give it now.

The arguments on both sides may now be presented in a very small compass.

The Pædo-baptist argument will stand thus :

1. Those who are holy are fit subjects for baptism.
2. The children of believers are holy.
3. Therefore they are fit for baptism.

The refutation consists in defining the sense of ‘holy.’ Rightly taken in this place, it gives no ground for baptism. And the counter arguments are :—

1. The holiness which belongs to a heathen wife, is no lawful ground for baptism.
2. The holiness possessed by believers’ children, infant and adult, is the holiness which belongs to a heathen wife.

3. It is therefore no lawful ground for baptism.

And in another form :—

1. Those who are by an apostle set on the same footing, received the same treatment at his hands.
2. The heathen wife and believers’ children are by an apostle set on the same footing.
3. Therefore they received the same treatment.

But the heathen wife was not baptized; as is granted. Then neither were the children of believers, considered simply as such. Of course if any of them believed, they were acknowledged and baptized. They were then baptized as believers, not as children of believers. But we are speaking of their position now, simply as they were children of the flesh.

Behold then in the text before us a balance contrived by God, that we may weigh any theory that professes to explain this point. Any interpretation which would set the unbelieving wife either higher or lower than the unbelieving children, is unsound.

It destroys the inspired argument, and the asserted equality of the two states.

The holiness in question will baptize *both* or *neither*. Make holiness to mean saving sanctification, and you overturn the gospel. You then assert, that unbelievers are holy before God! Take holiness in its lower sense of civil legitimacy, and it gives no quiet to the conscience, no real reply to the question. Regard holiness as ceremonial fitness for ordinances, and you must shrink from its application on one side of the balance.

Pædo-baptists would baptize the *children*, but not the heathen *wife*. But this the apostle will not allow. If the children's holiness fits them for baptism, it fits also the *heathen wife*. If they were baptized, so was the heathen wife. Do you start? Is that absurd? So then neither were the children baptized. Faith is the indispensable requirement for baptism in all cases, whether in adults or children. "The like figure whereunto even baptism also doth now save us: not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but THE ANSWER OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE BEFORE GOD:" 1 Pet. iii, 21.

And if the infants, even of believers, were not baptized in apostolic churches, because unable to give the answer of faith, *none ought to be baptized now*. INFANT BAPTISM THEN IS A TRADITION OF MEN!

Is the argument of this tract *fallacious*? Expose it! Is it *sound*? Obey the truth yourself, and spread it!

Believers! were you only sprinkled while an unbelieving infant? Sprinkling is not baptism, for baptism means immersion. And even the *immersion* of one who does not savingly believe, is not apostolic and scriptural baptism. Are you *unbaptized* then? Be immersed in obedience to your Lord! in memory of his burial and resurrection, and of your oneness with him in both! (Rom. vi.)