

Baptism For The Dead

1 Cor. 15:29

Part 1

Introduction.

1. There are millions of people in the world today who believe that the living can be baptized for the dead.
 - a. Those who believe in baptism for the dead have good intentions, wishing to secure salvation for lost loved ones and even to strangers.
 - b. They believe the efficacy [power, effectiveness] of their baptism will save those who are physically dead and in the spirit realm.
2. All believers have lost ones who were not baptized and perhaps rejected Christ and they would like to do something to secure their salvation and keep them from being lost forever in hell.
3. Those who believe in the baptism for the dead use 1 Corinthians 15:29 as a proof text.

1CO 15:29 Otherwise, what will those [they] do who are baptized [immersed] for the dead [ones]? If the dead [ones] are not raised at all, why then are they baptized [immersed] for [in place of] them [for the dead ones]?

Context

1. As we begin to examine this doctrine it is important to emphasize that this verse must be studied in context in order to ascertain its meaning.
2. 1 Corinthians 15 is commonly called "The Resurrection Chapter Of The Bible."
3. In this chapter Paul discusses the importance and nature of the resurrection.
 - a. He begins the chapter by teaching the death, burial and bodily resurrection of Christ are the very heart of the gospel. (1 Cor. 15:1-4).
 - b. Paul then lists some of the witnesses to Christ's bodily resurrection. (1 Cor. 15:5-8).

1 Cor 15:5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

1 Cor 15:6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;

1 Cor 15:7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;

1 Cor 15:8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

"ektroma" [ek troh mah] means "miscarriage, an abortion, abortive, birth, an untimely birth."

Some Additional Observations

1. 1 Corinthians 15:29 is the only verse in the New Testament that mentions baptism for the dead.
2. The word "dead," which appears twice in this verse, is the plural form of the Greek word "nekros."

a. It does not mean "dead one," but it means "dead ones."

b. The context would suggest that Paul is speaking of those who were physically dead. (1 Cor. 15:12-19).

1 Cor 15:12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

1 Cor 15:13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised;

1 Cor 15:14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.

1 Cor 15:15 Moreover we are even found {to be} false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.

1 Cor 15:16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised;

1 Cor 15:17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

1 Cor 15:18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

1 Cor 15:19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

c. The following verses also reveal Paul was speaking of a physical resurrection. (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

1 Cor 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

1 Cor 15:21 For since by a man {came} death, by a man also {came} the resurrection of the dead.

1 Cor 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

1 Cor 15:23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,

1) "All" must die physically because of Adam's sin.

2) Christ is "the first fruits of those who are asleep" meaning His bodily resurrection is the guarantee that all will be raised from the dead. (1 Cor. 15:22).

3) See also Jn. 5:28,29; Acts 24:15 referring to the general resurrection.

4) These verses are referring to a bodily resurrection - not "a spirit" resurrection.

5) Paul sets forth in the latter part of 1 Corinthians that the body will be raised. (1 Cor. 15:50-57).

d. He proceeds to give the duration of Christ's reign that ends when He comes and abolishes death at His coming (1 Cor.15:24-26).

1 Cor 15:24 then {comes} the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

1 Cor 15:25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

1 Cor 15:26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

e. Paul then speaks of the consequences of denying the resurrection. (1 Cor. 15:30-32).

1 Cor 15:30 Why are we also in danger every hour?

1 Cor 15:31 I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

1 Cor 15:32 If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE.

1) Suffering for Christ makes no sense if there is not a resurrection.

2) Living for Christ makes no sense without the resurrection.

Baptism For The Dead

1. It is in the midst of discussing the importance of the physical resurrection of Christ and the future bodily resurrection of the dead that Paul speaks of the baptism for the dead.

2. It is important that Paul changes the pronoun “you” to the pronoun “they” in verse 29. (1 Cor. 15:1-3, 12).

1CO 15:1 Now I make known to **you**, brethren, the gospel which I preached to **you**, which also **you** received, in which also **you** stand,
1CO 15:2 by which also **you** are saved, if **you** hold fast the word which I preached to **you**, unless **you** believed in vain.
1CO 15:3 For I delivered to **you** as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
1CO 15:4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

1CO 15:12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, **how do some among you** say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

“you” is used here to refer to those denying the resurrection of the dead.

Later “those” is used to refer to the dead who had trusted in Christ and to both dead and alive Christians. (1 Cor. 15:18, 20).

3. The "you" refers to those in the Corinthian church who believed in the resurrection. See also 1 Cor. 15:7,11

- a. They had been taught it and had received it.
- b. 3) Note: Paul used “our” and “we” to refer to the apostles and other believers - not those denying the resurrection. (1 Cor. 15:3, 14,15, 19).

4. The "they" refers to false teachers - Christian or pagan.

- a. Perhaps to the "some of you" in the Corinthian church who denied the resurrection. (1 Cor.15:12).
- b. It is possible, but less likely, to individuals outside the Corinthian church.
- c. It is interesting to point out that Paul would never use “they” to designate an acceptable practice of Christians.
 - 1) There are no examples in the New Testament of the practice of Christians being designated as what “they” do.
 - 2) Whenever Paul speaks of Christian baptism and other such practices, it is always “we” or “you” who were baptized and addressed in the first or second persons. The third person is never used to refer to something acceptable.
 - 3) See 2 Tim. 2:16-18 - Denial of the resurrection or teaching it was already past was considered a grievous heresy not to be tolerated.

2 Tim 2:16 But avoid worldly {and} empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness,

2 Tim 2:17 and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,

2 Tim 2:18 {men} who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.

5. There is no indication it was practiced in the church before the second century, and even then it was condemned as a heretical practice.

6. Some argue that Paul would not refer to such a practice if it were not acceptable.

- a. This is not a sound argument.
- b. Paul mentioned “dining in an idol’s temple in 1 Corinthians 8:10 though such a practice was sinful. See also 1 Cor. 10:21-28.
- c. Furthermore, the “they” shows it was not the practice of the true believers at Corinth.
- d. Some it seems were listening to the false teaching and may have begun to accept it or even teach it.

7 Baptism for the dead was practiced by some pagans.

- a. Just north of Corinth was a city named Eleusis. This was the location of a pagan religion where baptism in the sea was practiced to guarantee a good afterlife.
- b. This religion was mentioned by Homer in “Hymn to Demeter” 478-79.
- c. The Corinthians were known to be heavily influenced by other customs.

- d. It is possible the Corinthians had been influenced by the religious practices found at Eleusis where baptism for the dead was practiced at one time.
- e. It is not certain this was still practiced in Paul's day.

- 8. Some have argued that the pronoun "they" is not in the Greek and thus Paul is not speaking of the practice of the pagans.
 - a. This is not a valid argument.
 - b. The Greek reads, "Otherwise what will they do the [ones] being baptized [immersed] on behalf of the dead [ones]? If actually dead [ones] are not raised, why indeed are they baptized on behalf of them?"

1CO 15:29 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? NASB	1CO 15:29 Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? NIV	1CO 15:29 Otherwise, what will those people do who receive baptism on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? NRSV	1Co 15:29 Else what shall they do that are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them? ASV
1Co 15:29 Seeing what shall they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? why also are they baptized for the dead? YLT	1Co 15:29 Otherwise, what will they do who are being immersed for the dead? If the dead are not actually raised, why are they being immersed for them?" McCord.	1Co 15:29 Since what shall the baptised for the dead do if those that are dead rise not at all? why also are they baptised for them? Darby	1 Co 15:29 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? KJV

e. The Greek word "huper" translated "for" means "over, above, in or on behalf of, in reference to, in place of."

False Theory

1. Some believe in a **vicarious baptism**.

- a. They believe the living can be baptized to save those who died without obeying the gospel.
- b. There is no evidence this was practiced by Christians in Paul's day.
- c. The Cerinthians and Marconites, two heretical sects of the second century, did practice it.
- d. Mormons today believe in baptism for the dead, and some have been baptized scores, even hundreds, of times for those who died outside of Christ.
- e. This doctrine is not supported by the scriptures.
 - 1) There is no command for vicarious baptism.
 - 2) There is no example or implied approval of it.

2. **There is much evidence against it.**

- a. This doctrine negates the importance of faith, repentance, confession, and the decision to be baptized for the remission of sins. (Heb. 11:6; Lk. 13:3; Rom.10:9,10; Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16).
 - 1) Some assume we do not need to do these things and can live the way we want to live.
 - 2) The important thing is to have someone willing to be baptized for us after death.
 - 3) This puts all the emphasis on baptism, and none on honoring Christ with godly living.
 - 4) No one, no matter how much they love us and want us to be saved, can believe for us, repent for us, confess for us, be baptized for us, or live the Christian life for us.
- b. This doctrine violates the spiritual law that we reap what we sow. (Gal. 6:7, 8).
- c. **This doctrine negates the importance of the Great Commission.** (Matt. 28:19, 20; Mk. 16:15, 16).
 - 1) This doctrine suggests that the fastest and easiest way to convert sinners is not to teach them the gospel and take the chance they might reject it.

2) The best way to save sinners would be to get into the waters of baptism and be baptized over and over again for the lost.

d. The Bible does not speak of vicarious acts for the dead, but teaches following death there is judgment. (Heb. 9:27).

e. The account of the rich man and Lazarus reveals men will not be given a second chance. (Lk. 16:19-31).

Luke 16:19 "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day.

Luke 16:20 "And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores,

Luke 16:21 and longing to be fed with the {crumbs} which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.

Luke 16:22 "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.

Luke 16:23 "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and *saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.

Luke 16:24 "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'

Luke 16:25 "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.

Luke 16:26 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and {that} none may cross over from there to us.'

Luke 16:27 "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house--

Luke 16:28 for I have five brothers--in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

Luke 16:29 "But Abraham *said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'

Luke 16:30 "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!'

Luke 16:31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

1) The rich man was not given a second chance nor was someone commissioned to be baptized for him. (Lk. 16:19-25).

2) The salvation of his five brothers depended on them listening to Moses and the prophets. (Lk. 16:27-31).

3) No one would be able to save or help the rich man or his brothers after death.

4) Man must give account for the things done in the body. (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10).

f. **Note:** The teachings of Mormonism contradicts the Bible and themselves.

"The ordinance of baptizing for the dead...was instituted from before the foundation of the world (Doctrine & Covenants, Reorganized, sec. 107).

The Book of Mormon teaches against baptism for the dead.

"Behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors. ...Therefore I beseech of you, that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end;

for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life then cometh the night of darkness, where there can be no labor performed. ...Behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of

repentance, even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his;

therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you;

and this is the final state of the wicked ("Book of Alma" 34:32-35).

g. This statement is in direct contradiction to the teaching the living can be baptized for the dead.

"Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®,
© Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation

Used by permission." (www.Lockman.org)

