

## Baptism for the Dead

What does it mean to be baptized for the dead?

First Corinthians 15.29

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Scripture Reader and Reading: Billy Henshall – Romans 6.3–5

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Phil Joseph – No suggestions

### **Prelude:**

#### **I. In First Corinthians 15.29,**

- A. Paul made an interesting argument
- B. for the resurrection
  - 1. by refuting those who denied the resurrection.
  - 2. He worded part of his argument in a way that we would not have:

**29 Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?**

#### **II. It is the word “for” that throws us off, but**

- A. only because we think of the Mormon practice of
- B. baptizing living persons on behalf of dead persons.
  - 1. We know that such violates biblical teaching, but
  - 2. still we question what Paul meant.

### **Persuasion:**

#### **I. The Various Interpretations of First Corinthians 15.29**

- A. Most interpretations are tainted with the Mormon practice,
  - 1. that of proxy or vicarious baptism,
  - 2. that of being baptized for people
    - a) who have already died
    - b) to save them from eternal condemnation.
  - 3. However, we know that the rest of the New Testament on baptism,
    - a) does not support such an interpretation or practice.

(1) Baptism is for believers.

(2) Baptism is for people who make the decision for themselves.

b) Also, once you have died, God has sealed your eternal destiny.

B. Some believe that Paul referred to a pagan practice taking place in Corinth.

1. However, why would he do that?

2. It does not fit his argument.

a) He did not do this anywhere else in his argument.

b) Moreover, he referred to an accepted or approved practice.

C. Did Paul refer to a practice some had initiated in the church,

1. although a false practice, but

2. that he assumed, "for the sake of argument," that it is true, and

a) that denying the resurrection also denied

b) this practice that they had accepted.

(1) I can see some merit in this view, but

(2) it still does not fit the flow of his argument.

(a) He is presenting to them true doctrines

(b) that the denial of the resurrection also deny.

i) I will show you that Paul's main argument (vv. 12–19),

ii) is that false doctrine always implies other falsehoods.

(1) I believe that verses 29–34 continue

(2) the method of argument that he used in verses 12–19.

D. The problems with these interpretations.

1. They assign some validity to the Mormon practice.

2. They assume that Paul would suddenly incorporate into his argument

a) a pagan practice

b) when that was not something he had done thus far.

- (1) Why bring that into the argument?
  - (2) It does not make sense.
3. They isolate the expression from the context.
- a) Every time you have a question about a difficult text,
    - (1) always seek to understand the context first
    - (2) before you consult other passages of Scripture and commentaries.
  - b) The context is important, because
    - (1) well, *it was said in a context for a reason*, but
    - (2) so much of the time when we cannot figure things out,
      - (a) it is because we do not know why the writer said it, and so
      - (b) we lock in on the exact phrase or whatever it is, and
        - i) our thinking starts to go in all sorts of directions from there,
        - ii) leading to wild theories.
          - (1) This is why I like to do expository preaching and
          - (2) to preach through Bible Books.

E. So then, what is the context of Paul's reference to "baptism for the dead"?

## II. Refuting the Denial of the Resurrection

### A. First Corinthians 15.1–11 • Witnesses to the Resurrection of Christ

1. Without saying that he is refuting resurrection-deniers,
  - a) he begins by reminding them of his preaching among them,

**1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.**
  - b) What he had previously preached among them,
    - (1) they also accepted, and

- (2) they stood in that doctrine, and
  - (3) that preaching had saved them, but
    - (a) only if they held onto what he had revealed to them,
    - (b) unless when they initially believed it was all vain.
2. What then did he preach?

**3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.**

- a) First, he delivered what he had received from God:
  - (1) That Christ died,
  - (2) That Christ was buried,
  - (3) That Christ rose again, and
  - (4) That many people witnessed the resurrected Christ.
- b) Notice what Paul did on that fourth point.
  - (1) He said Peter and later all the apostles saw the resurrected Jesus.
  - (2) Paul continued to give more space to the witnesses,

**6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.**

- (a) Over 514 people witnessed the resurrected Christ, and
  - (b) some of them saw Him more than once, so
    - i) over 527 times people saw the resurrected Christ.
3. Why did he say so much about the witnesses to the resurrection of Christ?
- a) Paul did not elaborate on the first two items of the Gospel.

- (1) Every member of the church accepted the death, burial, and
  - (2) so they thought, resurrection of Christ.
- b) However, we will find out shortly,
- (1) that some of the Corinthians denied the resurrection, and so
  - (2) before Paul mentioned that
    - (a) he wanted to remind them of
      - i) what he had preached and
      - ii) what they had accepted,
    - (b) as he continued to say,

**9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 11 Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach *and so you believed*.**

- i) Although he had witnessed the resurrected Christ,
  - ii) Paul knew he was not worthy to be an apostle, but
    - (1) that did not get in the way of two things (v. 19):
      - (a) What he preached (which from God, v. 3), and
      - (b) what they believed, at least initially.
4. Therefore, if all that is true that he mentioned in verses 1–11,
- a) especially his preaching that they had accepted,
  - b) he then presented a question,
    - (1) that begins to refute the error being proclaimed by some.
    - (2) All of them would have followed Paul approvingly in verses 1–11.

**B. First Corinthians 15.12–19 • The Implications of Denying the Resurrection**

**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. Here is where he caught them!
  - a) They had not thought through their denial of the resurrection, because
  - b) it denied the very thing they had earlier affirmed.
2. Then he began to show them the implications of denying the resurrection,

**13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. 15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. 16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.**

3. Denying the resurrection, implies:
  - a) That Christ was not raised, which led to more implications:
    - (1) The preaching of the apostles was empty, and
    - (2) the faith of the Corinthians was empty,
  - b) That the apostles were false witnesses,
  - c) That their faith was futile,
  - d) That they were still in their sins,
  - e) That dead Christians have vanished,
  - f) That Christians are to be pitied.

**C. First Corinthians 15.20–28 • The Doctrine of the Resurrection**

1. In these verses Paul affirmed the general resurrection, and
2. set out the order, the timing, and other happenings at the resurrection.

- a) Notice verses 20 and 23 in particular,

**20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep... 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.**

- b) One of the reasons that Jesus rose from the dead
- (1) was to give us hope for our resurrection from the dead, but
  - (2) if the dead do not rise, then
    - (a) Jesus is not the firstfruits, and
    - (b) we shall forever vanish when we die.

**D. First Corinthians 15.29–34 • Questions that Need to Be Answered**

1. Here Paul went back to refuting the resurrection–deniers,
2. primarily by asking them questions, as he did in verse 12,

**29 Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? 30 And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? 31 I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. 32 If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" 33 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." 34 Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.**

- a) We baptize *for* preparation or *in anticipation of* going to the dead,
- (1) that is, our baptism prepares us *for* death,
  - (2) knowing that a resurrection shall happen.
- b) Why were you baptized?
- (1) You wanted to avoid hell, and go to heaven.
  - (2) For this to happen, you have to follow Christ,
    - (a) which is Paul's point in another passage on baptism, but

(b) now consider how it fits in this context,

**3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection...**

**8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.**

**– Romans 6.3–5, 8**

- i) We died with Christ in baptism, and
  - ii) have been raised, hoping that our bodies shall be raised.
3. Yet, if there is no resurrection of, or from the dead,
- a) why be baptized for death?
  - b) They were denying the very practice
    - (1) that had saved them from their sins, and
    - (2) upon which the Gospel of First Corinthians 15.1–5 is based!
  - c) Remember back in verses 20 and 23,
    - (1) that Christ is the *firstfruits* of the resurrection,
    - (2) meaning that He was the first one!
4. He continued his argument in verse 30,
- a) that if there is no resurrection,
  - b) then he risked his life constantly for nothing.
    - (1) The way he suffered, he died daily (v. 31).
    - (2) If the dead do not rise,
      - (a) he says to make the most of today,



- (b) for there is no future life (v. 32).
  - i) Someone sought to lead them into immorality
  - ii) by denying the resurrection (vv. 33, 34).

**E. First Corinthians 15.35–49 • The Nature of the Resurrection**

- 1. Knowing that some questioned the resurrection because
- 2. they did not understand how it could happen,
  - a) he explained the nature of the resurrection in verses 35–49.
  - b) We bury a natural body, but
    - (1) God transforms it into a spiritual body.

**F. First Corinthians 15.50–58 • The Reason for the Resurrection**

- 1. Finally, he shows that we have to be resurrected
- 2. that our bodies might be changed to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

**Exhortation:**

**I. So then, have you been baptized?**

- A. You are dead and
- B. need to be raised to walk in newness of life.
  - 1. If you are dead in the spirit now, and
  - 2. remain in that condition when you die in the body,
    - a) you will be dead throughout eternity,
    - b) experiencing the second death, and
      - (1) that is not a total cessation of existence, but
      - (2) an eternal separation from God, and all that is good and pleasant.

**II. You may believe in God,**

- A. accept the truth that Jesus is the Son of God,
- B. try to live a good life, but
  - 1. if you have not been baptized,

2. you are still dead, and
  - a) have not been raised to walk the new life in Christ.
  - b) Why not be baptized now?