

## **BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD (PROXY BAPTISM)**

**1Cor.15:29**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. 1Cor.15:29 is recognized by most Bible scholars and by all Bible believers as a very difficult passage. Therefore, it is often misunderstood and flagrantly misinterpreted and misapplied.
2. One expositor mentioned a work which cites 36 different explanations or interpretations of this verse. Another expositor said the interpretations of it were too numerous to catalogue.
3. Obviously, there is much speculation as to the true meaning of the verse among Bible students and Bible scholars alike
4. Of the variety of positions held or of the various interpretations of this passage offered by men is that known as vicarious baptism or proxy baptism.
5. Therefore, the question before us is, What does 1Cor.15:29 mean? Or, What is the proper interpretation and explanation of 1Cor.15:29?
6. Two or three things must be kept in mind in the study, interpretation, explanation, and application of any and all passages of scripture.
  - a. No verse of scripture can be correctly understood and properly interpreted in isolation; the context must be considered, both immediate and remote context.
  - b. A basic rule of interpretation, regardless of the subject matter, is “never interpret a passage so as to contradict the teaching of another passage.” This is what is done by those who teach and thus practice vicarious baptism based on their interpretation of 1Cor.15:29.
  - c. It is always dangerous to base a religious practice on the obscure meaning of a Bible passage of which 1Cor.15:29 is a case in point.
7. In view of the recognized difficulty in understanding what 1Cor.15:29 means, I remind you of another pertinent point as we introduce the passage for study, which is this: One thing for sure, even if it should be the case that we do not know what the passage does mean, we can know for certain what it does not mean!

- a. You may raise the question: How can that be the case? If it be the case that you do not know, or cannot determine, what the passage does mean, how then can you know what it does not mean?
- b. The answer is simple. Illustrate by the identity of two different people. I can know for certain the true identity of the one, while not knowing the true identity of the other. Cite and example.
- c. Just so, even if I should not be able to determine the true meaning of 1Cor.15:29, I know for certain it does not teach what is known as vicarious baptism, proxy baptism, baptism for the dead ones, because I know, and can prove by the scriptures, that doctrine contradicts the truth on N.T. baptism, which is easy to understand.

## **II. DISCUSSION**

### **A. FIRST, WE ESTABLISH WHAT IS MEANT BY VICARIOUS BAPTISM, OR BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD, OR PROXY BAPTISM.**

1. “Vicarious” means “acting or done for another,” “substitute in the place of another,” “filling the place of another.”
2. “Baptism,” of course, according to its N.T. usage, has reference to “the process of immersion in water.”
3. Therefore, “vicarious baptism” has reference to the practice of the living being baptized for, or in the place of, or on behalf of the dead; or the living ones being baptized for the dead ones, or proxy baptism, or one person acting as a substitute for another in the interest of his, the dead one’s, salvation after he is physically dead.
4. The reason this is being done is because those physically dead ones, for whom, or, on whose behalf, those who are living are practicing vicarious baptism, or proxy baptism, died lost without the benefits of saving baptism. By this proxy baptism those dead ones can now be saved.
5. The Mormons have built a major doctrine upon their interpretation of 1Cor.15:29. Charles Penrose, a Mormon, writes, “The living may be baptized for the dead. One who has received the ordinances of the Gospel can stand proxy for departed ancestors who will receive the benefit of the earthly ordinances or obedience to the Gospel in spirit.” – Charles W.

Penrose, President, What the “Mormons” Believe (Salt Lake City, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, no date).

6. The Mormons currently practice vicarious baptism; however, their proof of the practice is so tied into their belief in continuous revelation, that proper exegesis of this verse will have little effect on them. Their prophets have authorized vicarious baptism; hence, if there were no other word in all of the Bible about it, they would still be obligated to practice it. Their defense of the practice begins with the idea that “it is an unthinkable and immoral doctrine to admit that all those men who died or who will die without baptism are damned forever.” From that presupposition, based solely on human reasoning, the practice is authorized by an appeal to their prophets and this verse.

**B. SCRIPTURAL REASONS WHY THE DOCTRINE OF VICARIOUS BAPTISM IS WRONG AND WHY IT CAN'T BE THE PROPER INTERPRETATION OF 1COR.15:29.**

1. The whole theory is antagonistic to, contrary to, every Scripture in the N.T. which plainly teaches:
  - a. That every man is personally accountable to the Lord for what he personally does, or is supposed to do, Lk.16:27-31; Jno.5:39,40; 5:28,29; Rom.14:12; 2Cor.5:10; Heb.5:8,9; 9:27; Eccl.12:13,14.
    - (1) One person cannot obey for another person anymore than one can believe for another!
    - (2) Even Jesus Christ could not do that for us!
  - b. That one's final destiny is completely, finally, and forever sealed at death, Lk.16:19-31; Heb.9:27; 2Th.1:6-10; Prov.11:7.
    - (1) Whereas, the vicarious baptism or proxy baptism theory, contrary to these plain passages, teaches a change of spiritual state after death.
    - (2) Shades of a purgatory-like doctrine! It's a purgatory-like waiting station, which has no basis in Scripture, only in the false doctrine of men. Cf. Mt.15:9.
  - c. On the doctrine of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ.
    - (1) That it is for the person who believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, Ac.8:35-37a; 16:30-33.

Cf. Jno.8:21,24; Heb.11:6. In proxy baptism there is no faith on the part of the dead one.

- (2) That it is for the person who confesses his faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, Ac.8:35-38; Rom.10:9-11.
- (3) That it is for one who is a penitent, confessing believer, Ac.2:36-38,41; 3:19; Lk.13:3.
- (4) That it is for the one who by this means personally calls on the name of the Lord to wash away his sins, Ac.9:6; 22:16; Rom.10:9-17; Ac.2:21-41.
  - (a) This is what Rom.10:16 calls "obeying the gospel." Cf. 1Pet.4:17,18.
  - (b) According to 2Th.1:6-10, only those who thus obey the gospel are saved and untouched by the vengeance of the Lord at his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.

2. Further thoughts on the obvious fallacy of the doctrine of proxy baptism.

- a. If a man acting independently from the dead, can decide to accept the invitation of Christ in being baptized for another man, even a physically dead man, (and thus change the dead man's eternal destiny), then the fact that a man is damned or saved cannot be attributed to his own actions in his body.
- b. If one can be baptized for another, make the decision for another, and act for him on the basis of that decision, doesn't this necessarily imply that he is also actually believing for another, since baptism is for the believer? Has he also repented for him?
- c. What about the other side of this same coin: can a man reject Christ for another person? If I died saved, can one, who lives and who also rejects Christ, also vicariously reject Christ for me? How can one be true and the other false?
- d. It makes one's faith and obedience, as necessarily taught in the N.T., meaningless!

**C. 1COR.15:29 STUDIED IN CONTEX IN ORDER TO DETERMINE ITS MEANNG.**

1. V.12 reveals the problem Paul was confronting in 1Cor.15 and his reason for writing.
  - a. Some among them were saying, “there is no resurrection of the dead.”
  - b. Paul’s argument in refuting their false claim necessarily implies that what they were denying was the general resurrection at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ, not that Christ had been raised from the dead.
  - c. To refute their false teaching, Paul offers his argument on the resurrection of the dead in Vv.1-34.
2. Paul’s method of refutation is to first establish the credibility of the resurrection of Christ (which none of them were denying) as the absolute and unchanging foundation of their faith, then to show that the resurrection of all men (which some among them were denying) is a direct consequence of Christ’s resurrection.
3. Therefore, in Vv.1-11, first of all, he declared the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an historical fact.
  - a. In Vv.1-4 he reminds them that the gospel he had preached unto them, which they had received, wherein they stood, and by which they were saved, was centered around the facts of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection from the dead according to the scriptures.
  - b. Then in Vv.5-11 he proved that the fact of Christ’s resurrection is indisputable, which they believed according to V.11.
    - (1) This he did by the evidence of numerous, creditable eye-witnesses who had seen the risen Christ, Vv.5-8. Cf. Ac.1:1-3.
    - (2) Many of whom were still alive and could testify to the fact.
4. In Vv.12-34 Paul argues that the resurrection of Christ, which they believed, proves all men will be raised, which some among them didn’t believe.
  - a. In Vv.12-19 Paul proceeds to demonstrate the consequences (the dismal alternative) of believing in the resurrection of Christ and yet denying the general resurrection of the dead.
    - (1) V.12 raises a question about the inconsistency concerning their position on the resurrection of the dead. You are inconsistent, illogical, and

unscriptural in admitting the one – the resurrection of Christ – and denying the other – the general resurrection of the dead.

- (2) V.13, further consequences of your denial of the general resurrection.
  - (3) V.14a, still further consequences.
  - (4) V.14b, more consequences.
  - (5) V.15, still further consequences.
  - (6) V.16, the consequences of V.13 restated or reaffirmed.
  - (7) V.17, consequence of their position as to their own faith and spiritual state in sin.
  - (8) V.18, consequence of their position concerning those who are dead in Christ.
  - (9) V.19, consequence if one's faith is only a vague, unproven, false hope involving this life only.
- b. In Vv.20-23, we have the grand affirmation, where Paul boldly reaffirms the fact of the general resurrection from the dead as a logical consequence of Christ's resurrection from the dead.
- (1) V.20, Christ being risen from the dead –raised, and stands raised, a fixed or permanent state – has become “the firstfruits of them that slept.”
    - (a) Whenever the firstfruits of the crop were offered, they guaranteed that the rest of the crop would follow – would be accepted as lawful.
    - (b) As the firstfruits are the earnest of later harvesting, so the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the guarantee of the general resurrection. See Rom.5:15-19.
  - (2) Vv.21,22, the fact of this further explained as it relates to the physical death of all by the man, Adam, and the resurrection of all the dead by the man, Christ.
  - (3) In V.23, the chronological order of the resurrection of all is explained.
    - (a) Christ, the firstfruits, already a fact, as affirmed in V.20.
    - (b) All others will be raised at his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.

- c. In Vv.24-28, the ultimate end, with its three-fold result.
- (1) V.24a, the goal visualized. “Then cometh the end,” or “Then the end.” (The resurrection of all will occur when this earthly order has reached its end.)
  - (2) V.24b, “...when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father...,” not set it up, or established it!
  - (3) V.24c-27, “...when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must...
  - (4) V.28, “And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall...”(The final position of the Son himself) – when God will reign supreme over all.
- d. V.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?”
- (1) As an aid to proper interpretation of V.29 think with me about the following things.
    - (a) Who are the “they” of this verse?
      - (1) Surely Paul is referring to the “some among you” that say “there is no resurrection of the dead.”
      - (2) Who else could it be?
    - (b) Whoever they are, Paul identifies them as being “baptized for the dead.”
    - (c) Obviously, what they were doing that Paul identifies as being “baptized for the dead” was not wrong; it was not “vicarious (proxy) baptism” because he did not condemn them for this being “baptized for the dead.”
      - (1) He only condemned them for denying the resurrection of the dead.
      - (2) And in doing so, he wanted to know why they were “being baptized for the dead.”
    - (d) If their being “baptized for the dead” constituted “vicarious (proxy) baptism,” Paul would have condemned it because that would have been and unscriptural, sinful practice, for the reasons previously cited in this study.

- (e) With just a little thought, and interpreting V.29 in the light of its context, surely all can see that Paul is still reminding them of their inconsistency in doctrine and practice.
  - (f) Therefore we are forced to look for some other meaning for the expression “baptized for the dead” found in V.29, a meaning that is both scriptural and harmonizes with all other N.T. teaching on the subject of baptism and any reference it has to death.
  - (g) Remember, “they” had been baptized, according to Ac.18:8. Cf. 1Cor.15:1,2; Mk.16:15,16.
- (2) V.29 is a definite reference to the act of baptism required by Jesus and how it in some manner is related to death or to the dead. **But how? That's the question with which we are faced!** Here is how:---
- (3) “For” in V.29 is from the Greek “huper” meaning, according to A.T. Robertson’s Greek Grammar, 632; Bagster’s, The Analytical Greek Lexicon, 414: “in reference to, as to, with regard to, concerning,” with the further signification of interest or concern in the subject.
  - (4) There is no reason for any believer to die to sin and be buried with Jesus by or through baptism into death, if Jesus is not raised. And, of course, if the dead rise not, Jesus is not raised from the dead. For it is by the resurrection of Jesus that baptism saves. Also it is by the resurrection of Christ that the dead are raised at his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. See Rom.6:1-6; Col.2:12; 1Pet.3:21; 1Pet.1:3-5.
  - (5) Furthermore, the baptized believer is united with Christ in the likeness of his death, and shall be in the likeness of his resurrection. Now if there is no resurrection, why do believers, especially these believers who deny the resurrection from the dead, seek to be united with him in the likeness of his death, and also to be in the likeness of his resurrection?

- (6) Baptism is so definitely tied to, or related to, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ that it loses all its meaning if there is no resurrection of the dead.
  - (7) In the act of baptism for the remission of sin, the believer symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. **He also seeks by this means to attain unto the resurrection unto life in the final judgment.** See Phil.3:7-14; Jno.5:28,29; 2Th.1:6-10; 1Pet.4:17,18.
  - (8) Without a doubt, the apostle here in 1Cor.15:29 is referring to baptism as administered to all believers and with reference to the blessings obtained thereby, both now and in the life to come, for which all believers submit if they understand its purpose and relationship to Christ.
- e. In Vv.30-34, in view of the problem being discussed, Paul raises a question relative to his own experience, plus a warning and an exhortation to the Corinthian saints concerning it.
- (1) V.30, “And why stand we (i.e., Paul) in jeopardy every hour?”
    - (a) That is, if the dead are not raised, why do I continue to place my life in jeopardy every hour in order to preach the gospel, which preaches a resurrection of the dead through Jesus? Cf. Ac.4:1,2; 17:31,32; 24:15.
  - (2) V.31, evidence of this jeopardy: “I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.”
  - (3) V.32, This experience exemplified and expanded into an argument: “If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus (because of my preaching the gospel and resurrection from the dead through Jesus), what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die.”
    - (a) If there is no future life, there is no reason for a man to strive to live righteously and

suffer for the gospel's sake; he might as well live the hedonistic life!

- (b) Indeed, belief in the resurrection of the dead and a future judgment has moral safeguards.
- (4) V.33, warning against the corrupting influence of rationalistic deniers of the resurrection of the dead: "Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals."
  - (a) The warning is to avoid the false teaching of the "some among you" (V.12)
  - (b) Such evil companionships (bad company) has a corrupting influence.
- (5) V.34, Exhortation to free themselves from the practical effect of this influence: "Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some (some among you) have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame."
  - (a) Become sober, some to your senses.
  - (b) As men are intoxicated by strong drink, the Corinthians were being intoxicated by false doctrine.
  - (c) They needed to "sober up" lest they be led away into sin.

### III. CONCLUSION

1. Obviously, 1Cor.15:29 has no reference to "vicarious (proxy) baptism" when it speaks of some at Corinth being "baptized for the dead." Two reasons why this is so:
  - a. Paul did not condemn them for being "baptized for the dead," which he would have done if that is what they were practicing! Reasons cited preciously in this study.
  - b. He simply cited them for their inconsistency in denying the resurrection of the dead and then practicing something that affirmed what they were denying was true.
2. With the expression "baptized for the dead" properly considered in context, both immediate and remote, it becomes obvious that it has reference to baptism in the name of Christ for the remission of sins.