

General Topics :: Did Jesus Establish baptism for the dead?

Did Jesus Establish baptism for the dead? - posted by kobilove, on: 2006/6/18 14:30

A group of Latter Day Saints came to my house sometime ago. They raised the topic of Baptism for the dead and read from 1 Cor 15: 29.

Baptism for the dead does not sound Biblical to me.

Can someone tell me what Paul meant in 1 cor 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?"

Can proxy baptism performed for the dead on earth help them attain eternal life in the presence of God?

Re: Did Jesus Establish baptism for the dead? - posted by IRONMAN (), on: 2006/6/18 15:11

bro Kobilove

i do not see how one can use this as baptism for the dead if the whole chapter is read in context save to say that regarding this, they are deceived. what Paul is trying to get across is (as it seems to me) it that there were some who believed that Christ had not risen from the dead (hence at the beginning of this passage he says if there is no resurrection) and yet were being baptized in His name. if they didn't believe in the resurrection, what was the point of being baptized in the name of one they considered dead?

he was making the point that Christ had indeed risen and is the firstfruits of the resurrection and we who are baptized into Him are baptized into this eternal life. There is no way to baptize the dead so that they may receive eternal life. if one doesn't come to Christ on this side, he is condemned on the other and that's that. the issue of this being God's just and right judgement is hard to swallow because our own sense of justice and righteousness is perverted so we are averse to God's true justice coz it seems unfair based on our standards.

perhaps this is an effort to get loved ones into heaven or something, when we're there even if loved ones on this side aren't there, we're certainly not going to feel a sense of loss over them for eternity. that's a hard thing to reconcile, but then again we only know what it is to live here on this side and not there in heaven on the other...

Re: Did Jesus Establish baptism for the dead? - posted by InTheLight (), on: 2006/6/18 16:59

A difficult verse with many different interpretations attempting to answer what "baptized for the dead" means. I tend to agree with those who believe Paul was making an [ad hominem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ad_hominem) argument against some who practiced such a thing. Either way, I believe it would be a real stretch to say that Jesus instituted such a practice considering it is mentioned nowhere but here.

Really kind of a red herring anyway, it is good to have a sound answer to this doctrine so do a little study on it but remember when speaking with them to quickly move to the urgent matter of Christ's deity and the need to surrender our will to His. Every man has a conscience, appeal to it and pray, pray, pray.

In Christ,

Ron

Re: What is the baptism for the dead?, on: 2006/6/18 18:10

Stever responds:

What is Baptism for the Dead
Mentioned in 1 Cor. 15:29?

" 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?"

Numerous explanations have been offered for this verse ranging from the inane to the sophisticated. Mormonism, in particular, has claimed that this verse supports their view of baptism for the dead. In their practice, individuals go to their local Mormon temple, dress appropriately for a baptism, representatively adopt the name of a person who has died, and then the Mormon is baptized in water for that deceased person. This way, the dead person has fulfilled the requirements of salvation in the afterworld and can enjoy further spiritual benefits in the spiritual realm.

But, the Mormons are incorrect. They have usurped this verse and taken it out of context. So, let's examine 1 Cor. 15 briefly so we can see what Paul is talking about when he mentions baptism for the dead.

In Verses 1-19, the fact of Christ's resurrection is detailed by Paul. Beginning in verse 20 and going through verse 23, Paul speaks about the order of the resurrection. Christ is the first one raised -- in a glorified body -- and then who are His at His return. Next, verses 24 - 29 mention Christ's reign and the abolition of death. This is when this controversial verse occurs: "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?"

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. This religion was mentioned by Homer in Hymn to Demeter 478-79.2 The Corinthians were known to be heavily influenced by other customs. After all, they were in a large economic area where a great many different people frequented. It is probable that the Corinthians were being influenced by the religious practices found at Eleusis where baptism for the dead was practiced.

Paul used this example from the pagans in 1 Cor. 15:29, when he said, "...if the dead are not raised, then why are they baptized for the dead?" Paul did not say we.

This is significant because the Christian church was not practicing baptism for the dead, but the pagans were.

Paul's point was simple. The resurrection is a reality. It is going to happen when Jesus returns. Even the pagans believe in the resurrection, otherwise, why would they baptize for the dead?

However, some are not convinced by this argument and state that the word "they" is not in the Greek and, therefore, Paul is not speaking about the pagans.. Let's take a look.

Literally, the verse is translated as "Since what will do the being immersed on behalf of the dead if wholly dead not are raised why also are they immersed on behalf of them."

The issue here is the word, "baptizontai" -- "they are baptized." It is the present, passive, indicative, 3rd person, plural. In other words, it is THEY ARE BEING BAPTIZED or, THEY ARE BAPTIZED.

I -- first person singular
you (singular) -- second person singular
he/she/it -- third person singular
we -- first person plural
you (plural) -- second person plural
they -- third person plural

It is the latter form, the third person plural (they) which the verb "baptizo" is in. Therefore, the best translation is "THEY are baptized."

The KJV renders it as, "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?"

All of the above from:
Bible Knowledge Commentary on 1 Cor. 15:29. Dallas Seminary Faculty.

God bless,

Stever :-D

Re: standing in proxy, perhaps?, on: 2006/6/18 18:36

You know when you think about it, it seems Paul is talking about people standing in proxy for the dead loved ones.

Paul is saying, "why are THEY then baptized FOR THE dead"

I know the common belief is that people would baptize a dead body, but is it possible that loved one's were standing in FOR THE DEAD?

Just a thought.

Karl

Re: - posted by kobilove, on: 2006/6/19 9:01

Hi Stever,

Thanks for the explanation. I have read through the entire chapter of 1 cor 15, and I am doing some other research on the topic. Most of the books I read agree with what you said.

Thanks and God bless you.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2006/6/19 11:05

Just a thought, but if you notice the verse doesn't say "why are YOU baptized for the dead?" If the Corinthians were being baptized for the dead, why doesn't Paul address "you" Corinthians who are doing such? But, instead he seems to be talking about somebody else altogether. I'll try to consult a couple commentaries I have on Corinth to see what they suggest.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2006/6/19 11:47

According to Gordon Fee's New International Commentary on 1 Corinthians, he says that the scholarly world has proposed about 40 different interpretations of this passage. By this it would seem to mean that there is a lot of ambiguity as to what is occurring here in Corinth.

His ultimate conclusion is that there is simply a lot of things we simply cannot know with the current evidence. We do not know why these baptisms were occurring. We do not know who administered these baptisms. We do not know to what purpose these baptisms were viewed as having served. He says the Mormons interpretation of the passage is by no means supported by anything that is read in the New Testament or the history of the Church. Essentially, they are "filling in" their own blanks, without any actual facts to backup their supplied interpretation.

Fee does note a few things however that I found of interest. The plain reading of the text seems to indicate that there was some sort of baptism by proxy practice going on. Other "readings" are quite awkward, and simply do not seem to do justice to what the plain reading indicates is occurring.

It would seem the "they" of v. 29 is a particular group of Christians in Corinth. Being that the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians indicate strongly that there was a lot of divisions going on over doctrinal and practical matters, it would seem this proxy baptism for the dead was limited to one of the factions in the Church of Corinth.

Furthermore, it would seem this proxy baptism for the dead is possibly only occurring amongst the sect of people that are saying that THERE IS NO RESURRECTION. So, it would be therefore absurd to attempt to establish baptism for the dead as a normative practice for Christianity based on a Corinthian sect that denied the very resurrection of Christ, as well as any future resurrection!

How come Paul doesn't condemn this practice one might ask? Fee says Paul needs no more condemn this practice than Christ did the unrighteous steward in the Parable of the Unrighteous Steward. For Paul is invoking a rhetorical attack using Ad Hominem's to do such.

Fee points out that perhaps this practice doesn't carry the sacramental run-a-muck connotations that we think the passage is implying. It is assumed that this practice must be teaching some sort of baptismal-regeneration doctrine. However

, such is never once taught. For all we know it is just some sort of highly symbolic ceremony. Fee suggests perhaps it was as a baptism service on behalf of new converts who died before their chance to be baptized. Thus, Paul understood they were just doing a harmless symbolic ceremony, and granted them Christian charity to do such if they wished.

Altogether, I find Fee's suggestions quite satisfying. There seems to perhaps be no reason for looking to outside pagan practices to explain what was occurring in Corinth.

For further detail, see Gordon Fee's highly available commentary.

Re: - posted by kobilove, on: 2006/6/19 23:29

yeah, you are right. Paul seemed to be talking about some other group of people, perhaps a different religious sect. From the verse 12

"12But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

looks like some people did not believe that there is going to be a resurrection of the dead, within the church of Corinth. 13-28 talks about the fact that if there really is no resurrection of the dead then Christ has not been raised either.

"16For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."

From the Amplified Version

29Now 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?

It is very obvious that Paul was talking about a group who practised baptism for the dead in the hope that their loved ones will be saved at the resurrection.

I believe that Paul was saying : " hey Church of Corinth, if really there is no resurrection, why do some people get baptized on behalf of those who died without baptism."