

Sunday, June 3, 2018—I Corinthians 15:29-32 What is Baptism For the Dead?

Introduction

- Two weeks ago, I preached on verses 23-28. These verses were part of a paragraph that began with verse 20.
- In these verses we saw how Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection for the body Christ as well as the nation of Israel. Furthermore, we explored how Christ's resurrection was followed by his exaltation and glorification and that through Christ, God the Father will be "all in all."
- Today in verse 29 we come to one of the most disputed verses in the entire New Testament. The question of baptism of the dead has perplexed theologians for centuries.
- In preparation for this sermon I read what the following men had to say regarding verse 29:
 - Ernest R. Campbell
 - H.A. Ironside
 - Millard J. Berquist
 - J. Vernon McGee
 - Arno C. Gaebelin
 - E.W. Bullinger
 - Charles F. Baker
 - C.R. Stam
 - George Williams
- Quoting Albert Barnes, C.R. Stam said the following regarding verse 29 in his commentary on I Corinthians:
 - "There is perhaps no passage of the New Testament in respect to which there has been a greater variety of interpretations. . . and the views of expositors now by no means harmonize as to its meaning." (Stam, 260)
- In his commentary Berquist mentions "some forty to fifty explanations" that are given.
- It is important to note that these commentators don't even agree about the basic facts of the case. Some maintain that Paul is referring to a pagan practice while others point out that the practice of baptizing the living for the dead was not developed until after the New Testament written.
- Matters are complicated when one considers that cultic groups such as the Mormons condone and utilize the practice of water baptism on behalf of the dead.

- So, no matter what I say about verse 29 it cannot be viewed as crazy on account of the fact that there is virtually no agreement even among dispensationalists and/or fundamentalists as to the meaning of the verse.

I Corinthians 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?**
- As we ponder the meaning of this verse it is important to note that it begins a new paragraph that runs through the end of verse 32. The previous paragraph begins in verse 20 and ends in verse 28.
- One point that many of the commentators mentioned above seem to agree about is that verses 20 through 28 are parenetical to Paul's main argument. In other words, verse 29 is picking the argument up from verse 19.
- Second, many commentators even within the grace movement come to verse 29, see the word baptism and automatically think water baptism. This seems strange for the following reasons:
 - There is nothing in the immediate context about water baptism. For Paul to all of sudden be talking about water baptism on behalf of dead people seems strange.
 - The remoter context within I Corinthians downplays necessity of water baptism and emphasizes the believes spiritual baptism into the body Christ.
 - I Corinthians 1:14-17
 - I Corinthians 12:12-14
 - Third the Bible identifies many baptisms that don't have anything to do with water.
 - Baptism with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11)
 - Baptism with fire (Matt. 3:11)
 - Baptism by God the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13)
 - Baptism of Christ into death upon the cross (Luke 12:50)
 - Baptism in typical or figurative as illustrated by Noah's Ark, the anti-type of with is Christ's baptism into death.
 - Baptism of the children of Israel unto Moses (I Cor. 10:2)

- Baptism for the dead (I Cor. 15:29)
- Let's read the passage omitting verses 20 through 28. The arguments interrupted in verse 19 is resumed in verse 29 and continued to verse 32.
 - Verse 19—men who expose themselves to suffering, contempt, and hatred because of faith in a fable are to be pitted above all men. This is the condition of the Corinthians for believing a false message if the dead don't rise.
 - Verses 29-32—the question in these verses is where will preachers of this faith turn for recompense from the baptism of much deeper suffering into which they baptize themselves as preachers for the supposed benefit in another world of people who will remain dead for ever?
- “Baptism for, or on behalf of the dead is thought by some to mean that practice of baptism living persons on behalf of others who died without baptism. But this practice arose after Paul's death; and, further it is inconceivable that the Apostle could have used even as an ad hominum argument such an action of pagan superstition. But the context makes it clear that the Apostle intends the baptism of suffering which Gospel ministers must accept in seeking to rescue and save the perishing. So Christ spoke of His baptism of suffering on behalf of lost humanity which He underwent at Calvary (Luke 12:50).” (Williams, 893)
- “The words “baptized,” “die” and “beasts” (vs. 29, 31, and 32) are figurative; and this is made the more sure by the statement that the Apostle stood in hourly jeopardy of his life (v. 30); that he died daily (v. 31); and that the rejoicing of the Corinthians had been purchased by such suffering, for he was the author of that joy, seeing he had begotten them in the gospel.” (Williams 893)
 - I Corinthians 4:15
- In the following passages Paul describes the baptism he endured on behalf of his converts for their eternal advantage.
 - II Corinthians 1:5-10, 4:7-12, 6:4-10, 11:21-28
- I Corinthians 15:18—many of Paul's converts for whom he endured these things had already died.
- I Corinthians 15:32—“. . . would it not have been the height of folly to suffer such affliction and to risk his life every day in Ephesus at the hands of men comparable to wild beasts, if all his converts were to remain eternally dead.” (Williams, 893)
- “Great would be the folly of the believer of such a false gospel [I Cor. 15:12-19] still greater would be the folly of its preacher, because of the deeper baptism of misery which he would have to submit [I Cor. 15:29-32].” (Williams, 839)

- In conclusion, George Williams offers the following explanatory paraphrase of verse 29.
 - “If the dead rise not, what shall they do who are being daily baptized into misery on behalf of them? If the dead rise not at all, why then are they being baptized for them i.e., why expose themselves to such suffering?” (Williams 893)