

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

841 Old Hickory Blvd.

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oldhickorycofc.com

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"Baptism for the Dead"

What Was The Apostle Talking About In 1 Corinthians 15:29?

In the midst of his great treatise on the criticality of the resurrection as a central focus of the gospel, the Apostle Paul says, "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?" (NKJV)

It is actually easier to ascertain what this passage doesn't mean, because of the host of New Testament references about the purpose, manner and prerequisites of baptism. We can be assured that it doesn't refer to living people being baptized for dead ones who did not obey the gospel during their lifetimes.

The Mormons erroneously teach "proxy" or "vicarious" baptism, but there isn't a shred of support for such, unless this passage teaches it. But other references to baptism show it is an act of faith on the part of a living person (Acts 8:36-38) that must follow hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17) and repentance (Acts 2:38) and verbal confession of one's faith (Romans 10:9-10).

Proxy baptism (being baptized for someone else) runs counter to the teaching of both the Old and New Testaments, which shows that God holds men and women individually accountable. Ezekiel 18 shows that we are neither held accountable for our parents' sins or our children's sins, nor made righteous by their goodness. In Acts 2:38, where the first gospel sermon is drawn to its conclusion, Peter said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins..."

Further, we know from the Scriptures that at the point of death, a person's eternal destiny is sealed. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, we see that taught clearly. So the Mormon doctrine of proxy baptism for the disobedient dead and the Catholic ideas of limbo and purgatory are antithetical to the clear teaching of the Bible.

To make 1 Corinthians 15:29 refer to vicarious baptism for people who have died requires an interpretation totally at variance with other clear teaching of Scripture.

So, What Is This Passage Teaching?

If we are going to discover the real meaning of this passage, we must adhere to the principle of examining the context and being sure any exposition we make fits that context. And the context, as we noted in introduction, is the importance of the resurrection of both Jesus and the saints.

It appears that though the Christians in Corinth had obeyed the gospel that affirmed the resurrection of Jesus, which would have included being baptized (Acts 2:38, 8:36-38; 1 Peter 3:21), some were beginning to allege that there was no resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:12). The apostle is showing that a Christian's hope for the future is based in the reality of Christ

being raised from the dead. If Jesus was raised, then we can be raised, and that is key to our hope.

Further, the act of baptism is designed to affirm both resurrections. Paul wrote the Romans and said, “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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” (Romans 6:3-4).

When, as an act of faith in Christ’s sacrificial death for our sins, we are baptized, we join a group or class of people who will, like Jesus, be raised to immortality. So, the point of 1 Corinthians 15:29 seems to be, why be baptized if you don’t believe in the resurrection of the dead?

But The Language In The Passage Is Difficult

It is true that the language of the passage is difficult and this has led to a host of various interpretations. Some of the difficulty may, in fact, be attributable to problems inherent in translating from Greek to English.

Brother Mike Willis, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, makes this point. “The punctuation that appears in our (English—RB) text was added by later men; the apostle did not punctuate this verse when he wrote it. The divided opinions of textual critics as to how to punctuate it can be seen by comparing the Authorized Version with other versions...Although none of these translations reflects the punctuation which I am going to suggest, they do illustrate the fact that all of the punctuation marks in our text are added by men and that no one set of marks has any apostolic sanction.”

Then, Brother Willis suggests this punctuation of the text: “Otherwise what shall they do who are baptized? For the dead? (i.e., are they baptized to belong to, to be numbered among, the dead who are never to rise again?) Indeed, if the dead do not rise again at all, why are people baptized? For them? (i.e., are they baptized to be numbered among the dead who are never to rise again?)”

Now, whether Brother Willis’ suggested punctuation is correct or not, it at least supports what appears to be the context and meaning of this passage.

- Randy Blackaby

The Carnal and Spiritual Mind

“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace,” Romans 8:6. “Mind” in this context refers to the heart. To be carnally minded is to be primarily concerned about fleshly matter. To be spiritually minded is to pursue the things of the Spirit, while restraining the body to bring it within the limits of divine guidance. We are talking then, about two attitudes which lead to very different ways of life.

Difference In Thought

The carnal mind is constantly occupied with thoughts that pertain to this life. These things may not be bad thoughts or thoughts that are wrong within themselves. But there is very little thought given to spiritual matters.

The spiritual mind is occupied with thoughts of spiritual things such as the needs of his soul, the needs of others, the love of God and of heaven. Yes, he thinks of things pertaining to this life also, but from a spiritual perspective.

Difference In Affections

The carnal mind sets his affections on earthly things. These are the only things he really cares for. These earthly things may be things that are right within themselves such as money, his car or his house. Perhaps the object of his affection is nature itself—the beauty of the earth or the enjoyment of the great outdoors. These things are supremely important to him.

The spiritual mind enjoys and appreciates these things also but they take second place to something more important. He sets his affections on heavenly things (Colossians 3:1,2). He realizes that this earth is not his home. He is a citizen of a heavenly kingdom and puts that kingdom ahead of these material things (Matthew 6:3).

Difference In Attitude Toward Serving God

The carnal mind is intent on pleasing himself, or other people. He feels like he is imposed upon when asked to perform some service for the Lord. To him church attendance is drudgery. What he does in the line of Christian duty he does with the attitude of a deprived slave. His grudging service is primarily because of fear and not because of love.

The spiritual mind is concerned with pleasing God first. Certainly he wants to be pleasing to all men if possible, but he does not hesitate to displease men or deny himself in order to please God. Moreover, he takes pleasure in serving God. To him it is not a

matter of compulsion, but of privilege. Though he may fear the prospect of punishment for failing to serve well, yet he is chiefly motivated by love and respect for God.

Different In End Results

The carnal mind is at odds with God and is doomed to eternal death. The spiritual mind, being led by the Spirit of God, not only receives God's approval here, but eternal life hereafter.

- Joe Corley

Man -- A Creature of Choice

God made man to be a creature of choice. He allowed Adam to make his own decision in the garden of Eden, and he made the wrong one. Cain was later faced with a decision and he, too, made the wrong one. And man has been making unwise decisions ever since. But God still allows him to make them. He wants people who will make their own decision to serve Him. Sometimes we blame God for our mistakes, but the blame must be placed where it belongs, with man himself. If He should make a decision for us in any way, by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, or by some better-felt- than-told experience, He would have deserted this principle.

So His Son begs, pleads and gently invites us to make the decision to serve God and shows us the way. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy,

and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). And the whole situation is summed up in a statement made by the apostle in 2 Peter 3:9: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

- Bob Craig

- > “The great danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it!”
- > “Too many study their neighbor’s faults closer than they do their Bible!”
- > “Work and study as though all depended upon you, but pray and trust as though all depended upon God!”
- > “Some people are so busy learning the tricks of the trade that they don’t learn the trade!”

THIS WEEK’S LESSONS: Sunday morning: “*Grace Period!*” (Text: Luke 13:6-9); Sunday evening: “*Accept No Substitutes!*” (Jer. 2:4-13).