

THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

We have yet another unresolved question from Chapter 15:

1 Cor 15:29

Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? ESV

The question, as I recall, was to what historical practice, if any, was Paul referring to when he brings in baptism for the dead?

The first sentence in Adam Clarke's commentary following pretty much says what you will find in the various interpretations of this verse. So without laboring through five or six explanations I will use Adam Clarke; but without an endorsement. In other words, I still don't know what Paul means.

1 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?

[**Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead**] This is certainly the most difficult verse in the New Testament; for, notwithstanding the greatest and wisest men have laboured to explain it there are to this day nearly as many different interpretations of it as there are interpreters. I shall not employ my time, nor that of my reader, with a vast number of discordant and conflicting opinions; I shall make a few remarks:

1. The doctrine of the resurrection of our Lord was a grand doctrine among the apostles; they considered and preached this as the demonstration of the truth of the Gospel.

2. The multitudes who embraced Christianity became converts on the evidence of this resurrection.

3. This resurrection was considered the pledge and proof of the resurrection of all believers in Christ to the possession of the same glory into which he had entered.

4. The baptism which they received they considered as emblem of their natural death and resurrection. This doctrine Paul most pointedly preaches, [Rom 6:3-5](#): Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? [I am not convinced that Romans 6:3-5 is water baptism, but rather the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but that is for another study.]

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead, even so we also should walk in newness of life: for, if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in his resurrection.

5. It is evident from this that all who died in the faith of Christ died in the faith of the resurrection; and therefore cheerfully gave up their lives to death, as they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance, [Heb 10:34](#).

6. As is the body, so are the members; those who were properly instructed, and embraced Christianity, believed that as all who had died in the faith of Christ should rise again, so they were baptized in the same faith.

7. As so many of the primitive followers of Christ sealed the truth with their blood, and Satan and his followers continued unchanged, every man who took on him the profession of Christianity, which was done by receiving baptism, considered himself as exposing his life to the most imminent hazard, and offering his life with those who had already offered and laid down theirs.

8. He was therefore baptized in reference to this martyrdom; and, having a regard to those dead, he cheerfully received baptism, that, whether he were taken off by a natural or violent death, he might be raised in the likeness of Jesus Christ's resurrection, and that of his illustrious martyrs.

9. As martyrdom and baptism were thus so closely and intimately connected, *baptizesthai*, to be baptized, was used to express being put to a violent death by the hands of persecutors. So [Matt 20:22-23](#): "But Jesus answered and said, Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of? etc." (Can ye go through my sufferings?) "They say unto him, We are able. He saith unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of my cup," (ye shall bear your part of the afflictions of the Gospel), "and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with (that is, ye shall suffer martyrdom.) See also [Mark 10:38](#). So [Luke 12:50](#): "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!" That is, I must die a violent death for the salvation of men.

10. The sum of the apostle's meaning appears to be this: If there be no resurrection of the dead, those who, in becoming Christians, expose themselves to all manner of privations, crosses, severe sufferings, and a violent death, can have no compensation, nor any motive sufficient to induce them to expose themselves to such miseries. But as they receive baptism as an emblem of death in voluntarily going under the water, so they receive it as an emblem of the resurrection unto eternal life, in coming up out of the water; thus they are baptized for the dead, in perfect faith of the resurrection. The three following verses seem to confirm this sense.

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So then we will proceed with the Corinthian Letters and take up 2 Corinthians.

“Introduction

Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians discusses some of the things previously addressed but also deals with new issues. While 1 Corinthians called for believers to be unified with each other, in this letter Paul urges the church to be unified with him in his ministry. Paul’s opponents were undermining his work, claiming that his suffering (11:24-29) proved he was not a true apostle. Paul responds that his suffering highlights his dependence on Christ, as it points to Christ’s strength rather than his own. Second Corinthians includes stirring perspectives on gospel ministry (chs. 2-5), encouragements to holy living (chs. 6-7), and instructions about giving (chs. 8-9). Paul wrote this letter from Macedonia a year after writing 1 Corinthians, about A. D. 56.” ESV

Paul stayed in Corinth over eighteen months and went to Ephesus. In Ephesus he learned of the lax conduct of some in the church and thus made a second visit which was not too pleasant [Cf. 2:1; 12:21]. This experience seems to indicate a third letter that was lost [1 Cor 5:9].

THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY 2 Corinthians 1:1-24

How many times did Paul visit Corinth? At least twice, and perhaps a third time?

2 Corinthians was written from Macedonia (2 Cor 2:12-13; 7:5-6)

In 1 Cor, Paul was dealing with the local church and its problems.

In 2 Cor, he writes about the Christian ministry, with primary references to himself, but with application for all gospel ministry.

1. Salutation 1:1-2

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia:

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Since his apostolic authority was questioned, Paul opens with a reminder that his apostleship is directly from Christ Jesus, and not from other men. His authority is by the will of God.

Paul and the other apostles called by Jesus had divine authority. Men, such as Barnabus, were “sent” but not as an “apostle of Christ.” Acts 14:4, 14

A true apostle was a witness to the risen Lord and can have no successors in this office.

Timothy instead of Sosthenes Cf. 1 Cor 1:1

Timothy is included to show the Corinthians that he has Paul’s support.

To the church of God that is at Corinth...

This reminds them that they have the dignity of the church of God.

... with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia...

ACHAIA: [ah KAY yah] – in Roman times, the name for the whole of Greece....

This indicates that Paul’s letter was for all the churches and not limited to Corinth.

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Grace” is the unmerited favor of God and “peace” is the result of grace.

Rom 5:1-2

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

The pairing of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ illuminates their equality in the Godhead.

2. The Message of Christ's Comfort 3-7

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

Comfort is found ten times.

The benefit of suffering is sometimes that we can comfort others.

It will help us in our afflictions to know that through them we may comfort others. The heathen deities are dreaded by their worshippers. Our God is a God of compassion, even when we do not may not feel too “comfortable” at the time. When we, as Christians, are undergoing affliction do we know that we are experiencing our union with Christ?

Rom 8:16-17

¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Phil 3:10

that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Col 1:24

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,

Heb 13:13

Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

“As union with Christ was the source of the afflictions which Paul endured, so it was the source of the abundant consolation which he enjoyed. This makes the great difference between the sorrows of believers and those of unbelievers. Alienation from Christ does not secure freedom from suffering, but it cuts us off from the only source of consolation. Therefore the sorrow of the world worketh death.”

[Hodge]

Paul sums up [6-7] with a note of hope. Because the Corinthians share both his sufferings and his comfort he has no doubt of their salvation.

3. The Message of Prevailing Prayer 8-11

⁸ For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. ¹¹ You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

It is not clear which experience Paul refers to in Asia but it was one of the times he came near to death. Paul is more interested in giving God the glory for his deliverance than to give specifics of the experience.

Not only did God deliver him from death, Paul is sure that He will continue to do so until God is ready to take him home to be with Christ.

2 Tim 4:18

The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Paul writes that the prayers of the Corinthians play a part in his deliverance.

Oh the mystery of providence and prayer!

4. The Message of Conscientious Conduct 12-17

¹² For our boast is this: the testimony of our conscience that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you.

Paul is not being immodest when he says his behavior among them, at least eighteen months, attests to his integrity which is being impugned by others. Paul's glory is in the grace of God. Cf. 11:18 & 10:17.

¹³ For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and acknowledge and I hope you will fully acknowledge— ¹⁴ just as you did partially acknowledge us, that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you.

Paul says he is not writing anything that they cannot acknowledge from their knowing him. This may refer back to his first letter which they did not fully understand, or at least did not completely accept.

The obscurity of Scripture lies not in the supposed difficulty of its message, but in that spiritual insensitivity which cherishes the sins Scripture so clearly condemns.

It was Mark Twain [Samuel Clemens] who said that it was not the parts of the Bible that he did not understand that troubled him, but those parts that he did understand.

¹⁵ Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a second experience of grace. ¹⁶ I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea.

It was Paul's confidence in them that he wished to visit them twice, on his way to and from Macedonia. A "second experience of grace" means a double blessing of sending him on his way to Judea.

¹⁷ Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say "Yes, yes" and "No, no" at the same time?

Apparently Paul was accused of being insincere by his opponents. Or, do they think that he makes his plans without purpose?

5. The Message of Guaranteed Glory 18-24

¹⁸ As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes.

As an apostle sent by God, Paul is trustworthy. Yes means yes, and no means no.

Matt 5:37

But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. KJV

The Son of God, Jesus Christ, is always yes. By that is meant there is no uncertainty in what the Lord says.

²⁰ For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

Christ is the “fulfiller” and the fulfillment of all of the promises of God because the Bible is about Him from Genesis to Malachi [The scope of Scripture for Paul.]

²¹ And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

Paul’s character is backed by the character of God. Jesus is always “Amen.”

On the basis of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, God does four sure things in the lives of believers:

- a) He makes them “stand firm in Christ.” 21a
- b) He has anointed them with the Holy Spirit. 21b
- c) He has set His seal of ownership on them. 22a
- d) The Spirit in the heart of a believer is a “deposit.” 22b

²³ But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. ²⁴ Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.

Apparently criticized for insincerity, Paul sets the record straight. His change of plans was not made arbitrarily, but for their benefit.

Since no one but God knows the reason for delaying his visit Paul calls on God for his witness and to confirm his sincerity.

Paul assures them that he has no desire to exercise lordship over their faith, but only wishes to remove the sinful errors that hinder their rejoicing.