

Hard Sayings of the Bible

Topic: Baptism for the Dead

Scripture: I Corinthians 15:20-30

Memory Verse: I Corinthians 15:20

Lesson 2 I Corinthians 15:29 - “. . .*Why are they then baptized for the dead?*

INTRODUCTION: The Apostle Paul had been used of God to start a church in the city of Corinth. Corinth was located in southern Greece about sixty miles west of Athens. Paul spent a year and a half teaching this new church and then left Corinth to start another church in Ephesus. The devil fought these young Christians at Corinth and many began to argue among themselves within the church. One of the good families of the church sent a letter to Paul concerning the problems the church at Corinth was facing. (I Corinthians 1:11) By inspiration of God, Paul wrote the letter called I Corinthians to the church at Corinth to rebuke them and correct their problems.

One of the problems that had spread throughout the church at Corinth was the false teaching that there is no bodily resurrection from the dead. Paul corrects this false teaching by using the Lord Jesus as the Example. His basic argument is that since Christ is risen from the dead, then that proves there is a resurrection. Christ's resurrection also guarantees that those who have trusted in Christ will also rise again as part of the first resurrection. Paul plainly states that if there is no such thing as the resurrection, then “*we are of all men most miserable.*” (I Corinthians 15:19) To further prove how sad life would be if there were no resurrection, Paul asks the question in I Corinthians 15:29, “*Else what shall they do whom are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?*” Paul's question concerning “***The Baptism for the Dead***” has become another one of the **Hard Sayings of the Bible**.

I THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS CONCERNING THIS HARD SAYING

I Corinthians 15:29 - “*Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead. . .*”

- A. Some think Paul was teaching “*baptism by proxy*”
PROXY - “*vicariously; in the stead of; on behalf of*”
This false doctrine, based on the misunderstanding of I Corinthians 15:29, states that a living person may be baptized by immersion in water on behalf of an individual who had died having never trusted Christ as Saviour. Those who practice “*baptism by proxy*” believe that baptism is an absolute necessity for a person to be saved and go to Heaven.
- 1) Some in the early days of the Roman Catholic church practiced baptism by proxy. This practice was officially forbidden by the Catholic church in the fourth century.

- 2) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) continue to practice baptism by proxy even today. Mormons believe that dead persons who have not accepted Christ in this life will have the opportunity to accept Christ as Saviour in the afterlife. They believe it is their duty to be baptized in the dead person's name in order to give the dead person an opportunity to accept or reject salvation. They believe that the baptism by proxy is only to be done in a Mormon temple by a male holder of the Melchizedek priesthood. Mormons have baptized by proxy many famous people through the years including the founding fathers of America, presidents of the United States, Pope John Paul II, John Wesley, Christopher Columbus, Anne Frank and even Adolf Hitler. President Barack Obama's mother, Stanley Ann Dunham, who died in 1995, was baptized by proxy into the Mormon church on June 4, 2008.
- 3) The Old Apostolic Church and the New Apostolic Church practice baptism by proxy
- 4) Outside of Christianity, the Mandaean of Iraq and Iran practice baptism by proxy.

NOTE:

Baptism by proxy is a false doctrine for several reasons:

- 1) Baptism does not save nor is it a part of one's salvation. Baptism is the first step of obedience for a Christian to take after trusting Christ as Saviour. Faith in Jesus Christ saves the soul and baptism is an outward showing of what took place in the person's heart when he trusted Christ. The thief on the cross went to Heaven, but was never baptized. (Luke 23:39-43) Saul of Tarsus was called by the Christian term "*Brother Saul*" before he was ever baptized. (Acts 9:17-18) Baptism is a work and the Bible plainly states that works cannot save a man's soul:
 - Ephesians 2:8-9 - ". . . *not of works, lest any man should boast.*"
 - Titus 3:5 - "*Not by works of righteousness which we have done. . .*"
 - I Peter 3:21 (baptism) - ". . . *the answer of a good conscience toward God. . .*"
- 2) There is no second chance to be saved after a person dies. The time to believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved is before a person dies. Hebrews 9:27 - "*And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*" (Notice that there is no second chance to be saved after death.)
- 3) There is no such place as "*limbo*" where a person's soul goes after death until he decides whether or not he will trust Christ as Saviour. At death, the Christian's soul goes immediately to Heaven while the lost man's soul goes immediately to hell.

II Corinthians 5:8 - “. . .willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”

Luke 23:43 - “. . .Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

Luke 16:22-23 - “. . .the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments. . .”

- B. Some think Paul was teaching “*baptism for the removal of dead works*” This belief is false due to the fact that baptism has no ability to remove the sins of a man who is “*dead in trespasses and sins.*” (Ephesians 2:1) Only the blood of Jesus Christ can pay the debt of a man’s sin and that payment can only be received by faith in Christ. Baptism has nothing to do with washing away a man’s sin. Hebrews 9:22 - “. . .*without shedding of blood is no remission.*”

II THE MEANING OF THIS HARD SAYING

I Corinthians 15:29 - “. . .*why are they then baptized for the dead?*”

- A. “*Baptized for the dead*” refers to new Christians following the Lord in baptism to unite with the local church to take the place of those Christians who had been persecuted to death
Many Christians in Paul’s day were being persecuted unto death for their faith in Christ. These Christians were saved, baptized members of local churches who were willing to die for Christ for they knew that death did not end it all for the Christians. They knew they would rise again in the resurrection. When those faithful members died, the positions they held in their local churches needed someone else to step into that position. New Christians were being baptized and added to those local churches to take the place of those who had been martyred for their faith in Christ. Paul’s argument to the church at Corinth was this: *What would make a new Christian follow the Lord in baptism in order to be identified as a member of a local church if that position could result in them being persecuted to death?* These people along with Paul risked their very lives to serve the Lord and were “*in jeopardy every hour.*” (I Corinthians 15:30) Paul was saying that if there is no resurrection then why are we still baptizing the saved and recruiting them to take the place of the dead or “*for the dead?*” The reason a Christian would be willing to give his very life for the Lord is that he knows there is a resurrection.
- B. God still raises up new Christians to take the place of those who have died in the faith
Every Greek to whom Paul was writing understood how the Grecian army marched into battle. The soldiers would make several long lines called a “*phalanx.*” The men on the front would carry a large shield that would cover his body from head to foot. Each of the men lined up behind the

shield bearer would carry a long spear which rested on the shoulders of the men in front of them. If a man in the front line should be killed, the man behind him would drop his spear, pick up the shield and the lines would continue to march forward. That second man would pick up the shield “*on behalf of*” or “*in the place of*” the dead soldier who once carried it. This is a perfect illustration of what Paul was saying about those who were “*baptized for the dead.*” Ezekiel 22:30 - “*And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land. . .*” I Corinthians 3:10 - “. . .*I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.*”

QUESTION: Will you take up your cross and follow Jesus in baptism to forward the cause of Christ like those who have gone on before?

TEACHERS' TIP: **EVERY MAN IS LIKE THE COMPANY HE KEEPS - WITH WHOM DO YOU KEEP COMPANY?**

NEXT MEMORY VERSE: I Peter 3:15

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Many foundations in the local church have been laid, but few are willing to build upon them. Which of these foundations will YOU build upon to help YOUR church? Check the foundations that you know you can build upon and then write down specifically HOW you will build on it.

FOUNDATION:

How I can build on this foundation

Children's church

Choir

Church finances

Hospitality

Missions

Music program

Nursery

Soul-winning & visitation

Sunday school

Vacation Bible School

If every member of this church were just like you, would you want to be a member of this church? _____