

Baptism for the Dead (or Dying) - Is it Scriptural?

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?”

Baptism for the dead is a practice that was common in the pagan religions of Greece and is still practiced today by some cults. There is no record that the early church taught baptism for the dead.

What was being *baptized for the dead*? This is indeed a mysterious passage, and there have been more than thirty different attempts to interpret it. The key is to consider the context in which the Apostle Paul is speaking.

All the Corinthians were baptized, (Acts 18:8). Their baptism was a “planting” in the likeness of the burial of Messiah, and in the “likeness of his resurrection” (Rom.6:4,5). They were in, and raised from, a watery tomb.

Their baptism in the likeness of the death and resurrection of Messiah was in hope of their own resurrection from the dead through Messiah's resurrection. But if Messiah has not risen, and the dead rise not, this memorial and emblematic burial has no meaning.

The plain meaning of the Greek in verse 29 is that some people are being baptized on behalf of those who have died--and if there is no resurrection, then why are they doing this?

The fact is that simply because the Apostle Paul makes this statement, doesn't mean that he condones, sanctions or believes in this pagan practice. Paul is actually referring to a pagan custom (notice he uses *they*, not “we”), or to a superstitious and unscriptural practice in the Corinthian church of vicarious baptism for believers who died before being baptized.

Either way, he certainly does not *approve* of the practice; he merely says that if there is no resurrection, why would the custom take place? The point that Paul is making is in regards to the reality of the future resurrection. The Mormon practice of baptism for the dead is neither scriptural or sensible.

There is no record in Scripture anywhere, of the Master, John the Baptizer, the Disciples or the Apostle Paul or any Christian baptizing someone else on behalf of the dead or dying.

Are we followers of Messiah or followers of man-made customs and traditions?