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Dear Friend:

Many continue to ask the question, "What is 'Baptism for the Dead'?"

The practice of being baptized for unconverted friends is widely taught by one particular denomination. This custom is founded on their misinterpretation of I Corinthians 15:29.

The inspired New Testament Church did NOT practice this custom! The Apostle Paul did not teach it! The custom was introduced into the professing Christian world about 150 A.D. by the heretic Marcion.

Notice! Before a person may be baptized, he must first REPENT (Acts 2:38) and BELIEVE (Mark 16:16 and Acts 16:31,33). The dead are not able to repent or believe. The dead are dead -- "for the living know that they shall die; BUT THE DEAD KNOW NOT ANYTHING . . ." (Eccl. 9:5). The dead have no hope until the resurrection! BAPTISM IS FOR THE LIVING. Baptism is a symbol whereby THE LIVING acknowledge their sins, figuratively die with Christ in a watery grave, and rise out of the watery grave in hope of a NEW LIFE through the merits of Christ and the promise of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 6:4).

Baptism is also a symbol of THE RESURRECTION! TO RISE UP out of the watery grave is to acknowledge belief IN THE RESURRECTION of the dead (Rom. 6). To surrender one's life to Christ now, to crucify the self now, to be baptized -- all this is foolish unless there is a RESURRECTION -- if the dead are not raised, ". . . let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die" (I Cor. 15:32).

Now we are ready to understand verse 29. The subject of the entire 15th chapter of I Corinthians is the RESURRECTION. As one proof of the resurrection, Paul cites the example of those who were baptized, symbolizing their hope in the resurrection. The resurrection is THE HOPE OF THE DEAD. Why were they baptized if the dead rise not? is Paul's question. But the verse is NOT CORRECTLY translated from the original inspired Greek!

Paul is not talking about being baptized "in the place of" the dead; or "in behalf of" the dead, or "for" the dead. The inspired Greek word translated "for" is huper. It has several meanings: "above, over, instead of, for the realization of, for the hope of." The context determines the meaning of the word. Turn to Philippians 2:13, for example. Paul here declares: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." The Greek word translated "of" in this verse is huper, the same word used in I Corinthians 15:29. In Philippians 2:13, huper cannot mean "in stead of." It would be senseless to say: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do instead of His good pleasure!" The proper translation of this verse is: "God worketh in you both to will and to do for the realization of His good pleasure!" This is the translation given in The Analytical Greek Lexicon. What is God's "good pleasure"? "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom," said Jesus (Luke 12:32). God works in us "in the hope of" giving us His Kingdom.

Now turn to I Corinthians 15:29. Here the Greek word huper should be translated "for the hope of" according to context: "Else what shall they do which are baptized FOR (THE HOPE OF) the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized FOR (THE HOPE OF) the dead?"

What is the hope of the dead? THE RESURRECTION! Paul is writing about baptism, which illustrates THE HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION! Baptism -- arising out of a watery grave -- is a symbol of the hope of the dead -- the hope of the resurrection. This verse has nothing to do with the false doctrine of baptism in behalf of the unbaptized dead.

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