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PROMOTING BAPTIST PRINCIPLES  
& BIBLICAL PREACHING



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# BAPTISTS AND “BAPTIZED FOR THE DEAD”

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BY LAURENCE M. VANCE, PH.D.

*“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?”*

(1 Cor. 15:29)

**B**aptists are uniquely qualified to comment on biblical references to baptism. Protestants and others who allow sprinkling or pouring to be baptism, consider baptism to be a sign of the covenant, a replacement for circumcision, or a sacrament, practice infant baptism, hold to baptismal regeneration, or believe that baptism contributes in some way to salvation generally cannot be trusted to properly explain a text that refers to baptism.

It should also be noted that just because some group practices adult baptism by immersion doesn't mean that it understands the proper significance of baptism. Followers of Alexander Campbell immerse adults, but believe the plan of salvation to be repent, believe, confess, and be baptized.

The group with the most perverted understanding of baptism

has got to be the Mormons because of their practice of both “ordinary” baptism (ordinary to them) and “proxy” baptism (based on the reference to “baptized for the dead” in 1 Corinthians 15:29). In proxy baptism, Mormons believe in a vicarious baptism for their dead ancestors who were not Mormons. Those who have died and received a proxy baptism have the opportunity, so they say, to accept or reject what was done on their behalf. This teaching is found, not in *The Book of Mormon* (1830), but in their *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835).

This reference to “baptized for the dead” in 1 Corinthians has defied interpreters and perplexed commentators for centuries. There are thought to be about forty opinions on the meaning of the phrase in question. The commentator Adam Clarke has well said: “This is certainly the most difficult verse in the New Testament; for, notwithstanding the greatest and wisest men have labored to explain it, there are to this day nearly as many different interpretations of it as there are interpreters.” And as the Baptist A. C. Kendrick described it: “A passage which has been the occasion perhaps of more perplexity to commentators, of more varying opinions, and of more abundant discussion, than any other of equal brevity in the entire Scriptures.”

Although it is true that Baptists alone have the right perspective on baptism, this does not mean that they profess to understand everything about every verse in the Bible that mentions baptism. This is certainly the case with “baptized for the dead” in 1 Corinthians 15:29.

The views of an eclectic historical mix of Baptist preachers, writers, and commentators follow. Not only are no viewpoints exactly alike, most are in fact quite different.

The prince of Baptist commentators, John Gill, has much to say in his *Exposition of the New Testament* (1746-48):

Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead,... The apostle here returns to his subject, and makes use of new arguments to prove the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, and reasons for it from the baptism of some persons; but what is his sense, is not easy to be understood, or what rite and custom, or thing, or action he refers to; which must, be either Jewish baptism, or Christian baptism literally taken, or baptism in a figurative and metaphorical sense.

After discussing some theories as to what the passage means,

Gill says:

Those seem to be nearer the truth of the matter, who suppose that the apostle has respect to the original practice of making a confession of faith before baptism, and among the rest of the articles of it, the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, upon the belief of which being baptized, they might be said to be baptized for the dead; that is, for, or upon, or in the faith and profession of the resurrection of the dead, and therefore must either hold this doctrine, or renounce their baptism administered upon it; to which may be added another sense of the words, which is, that baptism performed by immersion, as it was universally in those early times, was a lively emblem and representation of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and also both of the spiritual and corporeal resurrection of the saints. Now if there is no resurrection, why is such a symbol used? 'tis useless and insignificant.

I see nothing of moment to be objected to these two last senses, which may be easily put together, but this; that the apostle seems to point out something that was done or endured by some Christians only; whereas baptism, upon a profession of faith in Christ, and the resurrection from the dead, and performed by immersion, as an emblem of it, was common to all; and therefore he would rather have said, what shall we do, or we all do, who are baptized for the dead? I am therefore rather inclined to think that baptism is used here in a figurative and metaphorical sense, for afflictions, sufferings, and martyrdom, as in Matt. xx. 22, 23. and it was for the belief, profession, and preaching of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, both of Christ and of the saints, that the apostles and

followers of Christ endured so much as they did; the first instance of persecution after our Lord's ascension was on this account.

The Apostles Peter and John, were laid hold on and put in prison for preaching this doctrine; the reproach and insult the Apostle Paul met with at Athens were by reason of it; and it was for this that he was called in question and accused of the Jews; nor was there anyone doctrine of Christianity more hateful and contemptible among the Heathens than this was. Now the apostle's argument stands thus, what is, or will become of those persons who have been as it were baptized or overwhelmed in afflictions and sufferings, who have endured so many and such great injuries and indignities, and have even lost their lives for asserting this doctrine, if the dead rise not at all? how sadly mistaken must such have been! why are they then baptized for the dead? how imprudently have they acted! and what a weak and foolish part do they also act, who continue to follow them! in what a silly manner do they expose themselves to danger, and throw away their lives, if this doctrine is not true!

Writing in the *Christian Review* in 1852, S. W. Whitney says that if we keep in mind that one object of Christian baptism is to express the idea that a Christian is "one who is a living *sacrifice*—one who has given up his hold on this life, and stands ready for Christ's sake to undergo, at any moment, all things, even death itself," then "we shall see clearly the apostle's meaning and the force of his argument." He holds that that "the dead" is a reference to just "a particular class of mankind—viz., Christians." He maintains that all Christians are baptized "for dead"; that is, "set apart as belonging to those who have renounced their hold on this life" or "set over by their baptism on the side of those who have given up this life."

The prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon, in a sermon on the resurrection of the dead in Acts 24:15 delivered in 1856, mentions our text and says:

This text has had thirty or forty explanations. Doddridge and a great many more think it refers to the practice, when a martyr died, for another person to come forward and fill the offices which he held, and so to be "baptized for the dead;" but the meaning I like best is: What shall they do who are baptized with the certainty that they are not baptized to live a long while, but that immediately after baptism they will be dragged away to die—baptized in the very teeth of death? For as soon as any one was baptised, the Romans would be looking after him, to drag him away to death. Thus they were many of them baptised as if they were being washed for their burial, and dedicating themselves to the grave. They came forward and said, "O Lord, I give myself unto thy service—not to serve thee here below, for that the enemy will not let me do, but since I must die, I will be baptized and brave it all; I will be baptized even for death itself." Well, what shall these do who are not baptized in the certain prospect of death if the dead rise not? "Why are they then baptized for the dead?"

An anonymous writer in the *Christian Review* in 1855 concludes: "If a figurative interpretation of the phrase, *immersed over the dead*, can be made out, it will probably be found to refer to afflictions, some such afflictions as the sufferings unto death which Christ and his followers underwent, from the hands of those who sought to extirpate his religion." He believes that "a figurative interpretation" accords "with the apostle's design." It "illustrates the absurdity of persevering in the Christian profession, in the face of danger and death, if there is no hope of a future life."

In an article by A. C. Kendrick in the *Christian Review* in 1862, he says that "the phrase 'baptized for the dead,' *ought*, it should seem, in its place, to refer in some way to those sufferings and woes to which Christianity subjects its votaries." He maintains that "Nothing but this fits into the context." Kendrick considers the explanation, "often adopted," of "baptized for [the resurrection of] the dead" to be "inappropriate." He contrasts this with his opinion of the passage:

The question which the Apostle should ask, is not, why are they baptized for the *resurrection* of the dead? but, why are they baptized for the *dead*? Not, why in baptism do they look beyond the grave? but, why in baptism do they devote themselves to the *grave*? Why do they undergo a baptism which brings them into sure alliance with the dead, if the dead have no resurrection? Why hasten to that goal, if that goal is nothingness or destruction?

Kendrick maintains that the idea of “baptized for the dead” in verse 29 stands in close connection to “stand we in jeopardy,” “die daily,” and “fought with beasts” that follow in verses 30-32. He further explains:

The very condition of discipleship was *taking up the cross*, having the sentence of death in themselves,—a devoting of themselves to death. Thus their baptism, as the symbol of their Christian profession, was both in its ideal character, as a denial of the pleasures and interests of life, and in its actual character, as exposing them to suffering and peril, from which they must not shrink, emphatically a baptism for the dead.

That idea is, baptized for the *dead*—baptized into relation to the dead, so baptized as that they belong, by sacrifice, suffering, peril, martyrdom—rather to the dead than to the living, and are thus the victims of a fate which has no alleviation nor apology, except in the resurrection.

Irah Chase tackled the idea of “baptism for the dead” in an article in the *Christian Review* in 1862 that also appeared as an appendix to his *Infant Baptism an Invention of Men* (1863). In his article, he refers to A. C. Kendrick’s article, mentioned above. Chase explains verse 29 as: “How, if there be no resurrection, can they escape the charge of inconsistency, or of falsehood, who, in most solemnly professing their faith, are immersed or buried in baptism and raised up again, with reference to the dead, as if testifying for them, that their resurrection ought to be regarded as a fundamental truth.” He concludes

that his interpretation may be briefly expressed as "The context treats of rising from the dead. To be baptized was to be immersed or "buried in baptism," and, of course, raised up again. And this was done with reference to the dead; so that, inasmuch as it was taking, decidedly, their part, the solemn emblematical act testified for them a belief in their resurrection."

A. C. Kendrick penned a second article for the *Christian Review* later in 1862 on "that much vexed, but interesting passage which speaks of a class who are baptized for the dead." His aim here was to "restate briefly" the exposition given in his first article "in connexion with one on the same subject" by Dr. Chase, mentioned above. States Kendrick:

The passage refers to baptism as pledging its subjects, especially in the apostolic times, to suffering and death.

The reference in that verse must be, not to the *logical inconsistency* of Christians' being baptized for the resurrection, when there is no resurrection, but to the *practical folly* of their being baptized for the *dead*, of their giving themselves, in baptism, to *death*, when beyond it there is no resurrection. Is it difficult, then, to determine what is meant by being baptized for the *dead*? Why, the Apostle himself immediately explains it. Each subsequent expression settles its general import. "Standing in jeopardy every hour,"—"dying daily," i.e., being in daily peril of death—fighting at the hazard of life, with the wild beasts, whether brutes or heathen men, of Ephesus—each of these is a fruit, or a portion (according as you take 'baptized' literally or figuratively) of being baptized for the dead. Each of these is an illustration and an element of that grand folly of the Christian profession which pledges its votaries to an untimely and violent death, with no hope of life beyond. We confess it amazes us that a solution of the difficulty of the passage so obvious, so near at hand, furnished by the Apostle himself in the striking and kindred phrases immediately following, should have escaped the notice of nearly all the interpreters. These phrases, in connection with the general train of thought, seem to establish clearly that the passage has a general reference to believers' exposing themselves to death, allying themselves to the grave, and thus perpetrating that great

folly for which, without a resurrection, the Apostle declares there is no excuse.

While such we conceive must be the general import of the passage, its more exact explanation we conceive may be matter of doubt. Whether *baptize* is to be taken literally or figuratively may be a question. If literally, then *all* Christians are baptized *for*, on behalf of, with reference to, the dead, i.e., so as to belong to them, and as it were delivered over to them. If figuratively, then it may refer to those only who are overwhelmed, plunged into afflictions and sufferings *for*, with reference to, the dead, and may refer to those only who are overwhelmed, plunged into afflictions and sufferings *for*, with reference to, the dead, and may refer more immediately to martyrs. We will not now discuss this point. Whatever special explanation we adopt, there is no difficulty in finding in the phrase that general meaning of baptized "with reference and into relation to the dead," which brings it perfectly into harmony with the preceding statement that believers are the most miserable of men, and the illustrations of this sentiment which immediately follow. We wish to add that not only the connexion of the thought, but the connexion of the sentences indicates the same thing. "Why are they baptized for the dead? Why do also we stand in jeopardy every hour?" Is it possible to read these two sentences thus connected and not believe that there is in the Apostle's mind a closer connexion between them that such an interpretation as that of Dr. Chase supposes? that they do not in fact express closely related ideas, and that the one is not merely an exposition of, or regular advance upon, the other?

Writing in the *Baptist Quarterly Review* in 1884, R. J. Adams criticizes the views of both Gill and Kendrick. The phrase "for the dead" refers to "all who die in the faith of the Gospel." He sees "two entire classes or persons, and not a few individuals of each class." The references are "to all baptized believers and to all who die in the Lord." Adams goes on to say that he prefers the interpretation "held substantially by eminent theologians of the early centuries, such as Chrysostom, Theophylact, and Theodoret, and accepted by some modern expositors." That interpretation he gives as: "Believers in their baptism make a confession

of faith concerning the dead. They express their belief in the resurrection. The apostle asks the deniers of the doctrine why they are baptized, signifying their confident expectation that though they die, and their bodies are laid in the grave, yet they shall come forth to the resurrection of life." He reasons that this interpretation is correct because it gives to baptism its proper signification, it makes Paul speak of baptism just as it is scripturally administered to all believers of every age, it makes the phrase "the dead" include all the righteous dead, it is in harmony with a proper use of the preposition, and because the symbolical import of baptism confirms the interpretation. He also explains:

Believers are baptized for the dead, that is, with respect to them, with the eye upon them and the mind over them, contemplating some important fact concerning them, and the context fully shows that this fact is their resurrection.

When, therefore, believers are baptized for the dead, they think and express something concerning the dead; First, concerning the dead Christ, that he rose; second, concerning his dead followers, that they too shall rise and live with him in glory forever.

In his commentary on First Corinthians for *An American Commentary on the New Testament* (1887), E. P. Gould says:

The difficulty of explaining the baptism for the dead, spoken of in this verse, is, of course, great. But the commentators are mostly agreed now that the obvious sense of the words must be taken as the only possible interpretation of them. Baptism for the dead is baptism instead of them, and so in behalf of them; in other words, vicarious baptism. It is a baptism for, or instead of, those who have died believing in Christ, but were unable themselves to be baptized. And the question is, what will they be doing who are so baptized? what will be the meaning, or use, of their action? . . . Of course, the objection to this is, that it makes the apostle seem to approve, or at least, mention without disapproval, a superstitious practice plainly inconsistent with his own teaching elsewhere. But this difficulty may be overcome by supposing that he is here using merely an

argumentum *ad hominem*, as our Lord does, when he asks the Pharisees by whom their sons cast out devils. (Mat. 12:27.) We find this baptism for the dead later among certain heretical sects. All the other interpretations pervert the meaning of either the preposition or the noun in the phrase "for the dead," or utterly fail to satisfy the demands of the context and connection.

But the editor of the commentary series, Alvah Hovey, adds in a note: "The interpretation given above, which is that of a great many others, cannot be accepted as fully satisfactory." He then refers to A. C. Kendrick's articles in the *Christian Review*, mentioned above, for the proper interpretation of the verse in question.

Knowledge of Greek is, of course, no guarantee of proper interpretation. If that were the case, then Greek Orthodox priests would be counted among the best Bible interpreters instead of the worst. Baptist Greek scholar A. T. Robertson, in his *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (1930), simply remarks about the verse in question: "This passage remains a puzzle. Stanley gives thirteen interpretations, no one of which may be correct."

B. H. Carroll, in his *An Interpretation of the English Bible* (1916), after mentioning and dismissing two theories about "baptized for the dead," writes:

Here is what I think it does mean: "As many of your as were baptized into Christ were baptized unto his death," i.e., "You made the profession of faith that you were dead to sin, and being dead to sin you are symbolically buried and raised to walk in the newness of life." In other words, to put it in plain English, it means this, Why retain the ordinance of baptism if there be no resurrection from the dead? That is what it means. What signification has it? It is a baptism unto Christ's death. What should they do who are baptized for the dead if the dead rise not at all? What is the use of the ordinance?

Writing more recently, G. R. Beasley-Murray, in his exhaustive

*Baptism in the New Testament* (1962), concludes:

I must concur with those who see in the practice of vicarious baptism for the dead a modification of Christian baptism, or an importation alongside it, that had taken root in the Corinthian church, not of Paul's planting nor of his willing. It was intended to procure for the deceased the benefits believed to be attached to ordinary Christian baptism. Contrary to what is frequently expressed, it will not have had a special eschatological reference to participation in the coming kingdom of God; Paul calls to mind the existence of this practice among those who were *denying* the resurrection from the dead; deniers of resurrection will not have their hearts set on the Kingdom of the end, the judgment and the new creation, for they operate with a wholly different world view. Paul's adducing of the custom here can best be interpreted as a drawing attention to a contradiction in the belief and practice of the Church in Corinth.

Paul's procedure does seem to be fairly characterized in the well known judgment of von Dobschutz: "Paul smites the Corinthians deniers of the resurrection with their own weapons without stopping first to estimate their value." There is no need to take exception to this view, on the ground that Paul could not have appealed to a practice that was contrary to his own convictions. An *ad hominem* argument can be used to demonstrate inconsistencies in people's views, without involving the speaker in agreement with any of them.

Schnackenburg remarked, "It is characteristic of him that he employs every usable means of proof—citations from the Scriptures and rabbinic interpretations, logical and emotional appeal, traditional material and *ad hoc* interpretations, when he wants to support an important thesis and convince his readers." The present case is admittedly an extreme example but it is not different in kind from some of those we have quoted.

The *Broadman Bible Commentary* on First Corinthians (1970), authored by Raymond Brown, remarks that "many interpretations of this verse have been advanced." He comments:

Some people, perhaps some of the Corinthians themselves, believed in *being baptized on behalf of the dead*. One view of this is that some

Christians got themselves baptized for loved ones who had died without becoming Christians. They believed that by undergoing baptism they could secure the participation of the deceased in the resurrection. That practice, asserts Paul, is an indication that those who adopt the practice believe in the resurrection of the dead. There is no indication, however, that Paul approves the practice. He simply uses it as an illustration concerning the resurrection.

Another acceptable interpretation of v. 29 is that Christians who have been baptized undergo baptism for Christians who died before they were baptized. This would be a way of asserting confidence that God would raise them from the dead although they had not been baptized.

In Robert Gromacki's exposition of First Corinthians, *Called to Be Saints* (1977), he terms the verse a "difficult" one, and only says: "To the apostle, the resurrection was necessary to fulfill the meaning of water baptism. Baptism involves an identification with Christ in His physical death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5) and with other Christians who have so identified themselves, both in the past and in the present. Thus, baptism would lose its meaning if Christ had not been raised from the dead in the past or if the dead will not be raised in the future."

Daniel Mitchell, commenting on First Corinthians in the "distinctively Baptist" *Liberty Commentary on the New Testament* (1978), writes that the expression "baptized for the dead" is "obscure." He posits two possible views. First, that "the expression may refer to young converts who took the place of the older brethren in the church who had died so that it would be properly rendered 'baptized in the place of.'" Second, that "the expression is to be taken synonymously with verse 30, thus being rendered 'baptized with reference to the dead.'" In the former case, it "seems that Paul would be questioning why they

are continuing to baptize new converts 'over' or 'in place of' the dead ones, if there is no resurrection, since baptism symbolizes our death and resurrection." In the latter case, "the people of whom Paul was speaking were being literally immersed in such severe persecution that they were dying for their faith."

Most recently, Mark Taylor, writing in the newly published volume on First Corinthians in Broadman and Holman's *The New American Commentary*, says by way of introduction: "Rather than continue with the theological consequences of no resurrection, Paul shows the incongruity of current practices among the Corinthians and the folly of apostolic suffering through a series of four rhetorical questions. Specifically, the practice of baptizing for the dead, whatever the phrase means, is nonsensical, and apostolic ministry, which entails unabating danger and daily death, is equally ludicrous if there is no resurrection of the dead." But because Taylor reaches no conclusion after reviewing the three general interpretations of the verse in question, we are right back to the prefatory statement he makes: "The history of interpretation attests to the ambiguity of Paul's reference to 'those who are baptized for the dead.' Perhaps all exegetical options have been exhausted with no commanding consensus regarding its meaning."

Perhaps indeed. The lack of consensus among Baptists is matched by the profound differences of opinion that exist among Pedobaptists as well. Some observations on the verse in question are in order, both general and specific.

Not in any particular order, here are some general observations on the verse and the context.

Baptism is mentioned more frequently in 1 Corinthians than in any of the Apostle Paul's other letters (1:13, 14, 15, 16, 17; 10:2; 12:13; 15:29). In fact, there is more on baptism in First Corinthians than in all other places in the Pauline Epistles combined.

Although it may not be immediately evident the point that Paul is trying to make in 1 Corinthians 15:29-34, it is clearly evident that it has something to do with the resurrection.

Paul's paramount concern in 1 Corinthians 15 is the resurrection of the dead, not baptism.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul addresses but one of a series of difficulties he ascertained among the Corinthians (factions, immorality, litigation, marriage, meat offered to idols, women's hair, the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts, the resurrection).

The crisis of faith in the resurrection of the dead is the most important issue addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians.

Baptism is meaningless if one does not believe in the bodily resurrection. And those "baptized for the dead" are wasting their time if there is no resurrection.

Being "baptized for the dead" must have been a practice known to the Corinthians or else it would have been pointless for Paul to use it as an example.

Paul dealt directly with various problems among the Corinthians. If there were some issue in regard to baptism, it would surely have been mentioned in 1 Corinthians.

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul focuses not only on the consequences should there be no resurrection, but also on the impossibility of

explaining certain actions apart from it.

Except for a brief reference in passing in 1 Corinthians 6:14, the resurrection is not otherwise found in 1 Corinthians but in chapter 15.

Vicarious baptism is without biblical or historical parallel. The concept is not found in the New Testament, early Christianity, intertestamental Judaism, or the pagan religions of late antiquity. Gnostic vicarious baptisms mentioned in patristic literature originated due to a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:29. There is no evidence for the practice of vicarious baptism until after Paul wrote about it.

For the living to do anything that would have an effect on the dead smacks of Romanism.

It is only by holding a sacramental or otherwise deficient view of baptism in the first place that one might think there could be such a thing as vicarious baptism.

First Corinthians 15 divides into five parts, bracketed by three rhetorical questions, and structured chiastically as A, B, C, B', A'. Verses 1-11 introduce a past event, Christ's resurrection, attested to by witnesses. Verses 12-28 are a series of logical proofs explaining that Christ's resurrection guarantees the believer's resurrection. Verses 29-34 introduce current realities, baptism in Corinth and Paul's apostolic labors, that affirm the resurrection. Verses 35-49 are a series of logical proofs explaining how there can be a bodily resurrection. Verses 50-58 introduce a future event, the bodily resurrection, attested to by Paul.

There is a parallel between "some among you" (v. 12) and "some man" (v. 35).

There is no reason to assume that the section marked by

rhetorical questions in verse 29 is not just as much a part of Paul's logical and systematic argument as the sections marked by rhetorical questions in verses 12 and 35.

Again, not in any particular order, here are some specific observations on the verse and the context.

Paramount to understanding verse 29 is an analysis of the terms "baptism," "for," and "the dead." in their context. To say that all Christians are "baptized for the dead" and leave it at that is as inadequate as it is inaccurate.

All three grammatical persons are found in verses 29-34. "They" (3rd per. pl.) refers to those who are with Paul in affirming the resurrection by their baptism (v. 29). "We" (1st per. pl.) and "I" (1st per. sing.) refer to Paul (and his companions [Sosthenes, 1 Cor. 1:1]?), who affirms the resurrection by his example (vv. 30-32). "Your" (2nd per. pl.) refers to those who are against Paul in denying the resurrection, having not the knowledge of God (vv. 33-34).

Paul distinguishes a particular group in verse 29, they "which are baptized for the dead," from the larger general audience of the Corinthians he addresses. He juxtaposes one group of Corinthians against another.

In verse 29, Paul holds up one group of the Corinthians as a laudable exemplar for the entire Corinthian community.

The word "for" has a tremendous range of meaning in English. It is used to indicate a destination; the object of a desire, intention, or perception; the recipient or beneficiary of an action; the object, aim, or purpose of an action or activity; equivalence in exchange;

equality in number or quantity; correlation or correspondence; a number of attempts; duration of time; extent of space; appropriateness or suitability; the nature or usual character of; suitability or fitness; something to be experienced or obtained. The word "for" can mean on behalf of, in favor of, on account of, in place of, as a result of, because of, notwithstanding, despite, as regards, concerning, as being, in honor of, constituting, representing, in favor of, in spite of, or with respect to.

The Greek word *hyper*, translated "for" in verse 29, likewise has a wide range of meaning.

Paul is not reproving those who are baptizing "for the dead" or those who "are baptized for the dead"; he is reproving those among the Corinthians who deny the resurrection. He does not mention baptism "for the dead" in order to enjoin its practice for those Corinthians who deny the resurrection; he mentions the practice to underscore their error. Paul is not concerned with the baptismal practice of the Corinthians; his only concern is in affirming the resurrection.

The focus in verse 29 is on what the ones who are "baptized for the dead" shall do if there is no resurrection, not on the ones they are baptized "for."

There is a parallel between "what shall they do" (v. 29) and "what advantageth it me" (v. 32).

There is a parallel between those addressed in verses 33 and 34 and the "some among you" and "some man" of verses 12 and 35.

1 Corinthians 15:29 contains two interrelated rhetorical questions concerning the "what" and "why" of those who "are baptized for the dead."

They who “are baptized for the dead” are affirming the resurrection of the dead by their baptism just as Paul is doing so by his apostolic labors and travails. Neither baptism nor Paul’s suffering make any sense without faith in the resurrection of the dead. The truth of the resurrection motivates both Paul and those “baptized for the dead.”

Paul distinguishes between the dead in particular, who would have been known alike by the Corinthians who affirmed and denied the resurrection, and for or on account of whom some Corinthians were baptized, and the dead in general. This parallels the contrast between Paul (“I” & “me”) and “the dead” in verse 32.

Throughout 1 Corinthians 15, Paul refers to the dead in general (vv. 12, 13, 15, 16, 20, 21, 29b, 32) and the dead as a specific group (vv. 29a, 29c, 35, 42, 52).

The word “for” occurs 14 times in 1 Corinthians 15, but only 3 times as a preposition (vv. 3, 29a, 29b).

Although not as common as in the sense of interest, benefaction, substitution, the word “for” is used throughout the Pauline Epistles in the causal sense of on account of, because of (Rom. 15:9, 1 Cor. 10:30, 2 Cor. 12:8, Eph. 5:20, Phil. 1:29, 2 The. 1:5).

1 Corinthians 15:29 is a reference to ordinary baptism, but baptism as an expression of faith in the resurrection of Christ and departed Christians.

Paul compares the actions of those “baptized for the dead” (v. 29) to his own (vv. 30-32), and sets both actions against those who would deny the bodily resurrection.

Both Paul and those “baptized for the dead” are motivated by

the resurrection of the dead. Neither Paul's trials nor baptism make sense without faith in the bodily resurrection.

First Corinthians 15:29 is an affirmation by the Apostle Paul of the actions of a particular group of Corinthians "baptized for the dead"; that is, undergoing baptism because of their faith in the resurrection of the dead and on account of the fact that if there is no resurrection, then Christ is not risen (v. 13). Their acceptance of baptism demonstrated their belief that the dead would be raised even as Christ had been raised.

The aforementioned Baptist A. C. Kendrick said of 1 Corinthians 15:29: "Some translate falsely, some interpret falsely; some, both." Let us as Baptists not be counted among either.