

1 Corinthians 15:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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?

Analysis

Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead? (Ἐπεὶ τί ποιήσουσιν οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν;)—This is one of the New Testament's most puzzling verses. The phrase baptizomenoi hyper tōn nekrōn (βαπτιζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν, "being baptized on behalf of the dead") has spawned dozens of interpretations. Paul likely references a Corinthian practice ("they," not "we") of vicarious baptism for deceased believers who died before baptism. Paul doesn't endorse it but uses it **ad hominem**—even this questionable practice presumes resurrection belief.

If the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead? (εἰ ὅλως νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται, τί καὶ βαπτίζονται ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν;)—Paul's argument: why undergo any ritual for the dead if death is final? The practice only makes sense if resurrection occurs. This is pragmatic argument, not doctrinal endorsement of proxy baptism (a practice unknown elsewhere in Scripture).

Historical Context

Church fathers offered various interpretations. The Mormon practice of baptism for the dead claims this verse as support, but Paul's grammar ("they," not "we") distances himself. Most likely, some Corinthian Christians practiced vicarious baptism—perhaps influenced by pagan Greek customs—and Paul uses it as **reductio**: even this shows you believe in resurrection, so why deny it?

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. Why does Paul mention a practice without explicitly endorsing or condemning it?
2. How does this verse demonstrate Paul's rhetorical skill in using opponents' own practices against their position?
3. What does this teach about distinguishing between apostolic teaching and cultural practices Paul references?

Interlinear Text

Ἐπεὶ τί ποιήσουσιν οἱ βαπτίζονται ὑπὲρ τῶν
Else what shall they do G3588 are they then baptized for G3588
G1893 G5101 G4160 G907 G5228

νεκρῶν εἰ ὅλως νεκρῶν οὐκ ἐγείρονται τί καὶ
the dead if at all the dead not rise what G2532
G3498 G1487 G3654 G3498 G3756 G1453 G5101

βαπτίζονται ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν
are they then baptized for the dead
G907 G5228 G3588 G3498

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 15:16 (Resurrection): For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:

Matthew 20:22 (Baptism): But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.

