

BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD  
1 Cor. 15:29

INTRO: We are commemorating the resurrection of Jesus Christ this morning. In the past number of years we have been going through 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection chapter of the Bible. Our subject this morning, in this resurrection chapter of the Bible is found in verses 29 (read). Now, if you were to give a title to the whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 it would have to do with the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15 is the resurrection chapter of the Bible. And as I outline this chapter, verses 1-11 deal with the importance of the doctrine of the resurrection. Then in verses 12-19, Paul refutes the denial of the resurrection. That was a problem in the Corinthian church. Then in verses 20-34 the hope of the resurrection is restated. Last, in verses 35-50, the manner of the resurrection, which has been questioned is explained.

Now the third section of the chapter, which goes from verse 20 through 34, I have called, "The Hope Of The Resurrection Restated." In this section, verses 20-28 give us the future with this hope of the resurrection. Verses 29-34 give us the futility of the future without this hope, and verses 33-34, the foiling of this hope by sin.

And so, we are in the section where the hope of the resurrection is restated. This is from 15:20-34. As I view this section, verses 20-28 give us the future in light of this hope (read). Then verses 29-34 give us the futility of this hope if there is no resurrection (read).

The text of this morning's message then is verse 29 (read). This is an extremely difficult verse. To borrow an expression from A.W. Tozer, if you have a charley horse on your brain after this message, understand that it is from the difficulty of this passage. So, I will give my views here under two points. First I will give you my proposition regarding this verse and then I will give a defense of that proposition.

I. THE PROPOSITION REGARDING VERSE 29

Whenever you have a very difficult verse you have many views regarding that difficulty as well. Some hold that in Paul's day there were those who were baptized for persons who had died without baptism.

This, you may be aware of, is the view of the Mormon Church. The Mormons have one of the most extensive list of names and genealogies in the world. That is because if someone becomes a Mormon, he can find his relatives in that list who died a non-Mormon and they can be baptized for them. We view this, of course, as rank heresy. There are claims that some such practice took place in the early church and that Paul is here arguing from that practice.

Let me relate something to you I have told you before. After I was done Bible school at Prairie Bible Institute, I served as the Credit Curriculum Developer for the external education program. My office was right next to a Bible school teacher by name of Larry Tatlock. Larry and I got along well and I stopped in to talk to him on a number of occasions. He had shelves and shelves of books in his small office and some were stacked on the floor and sometimes I would hear a crash and I knew one of his piles of books had gone over.

Well, I stopped in one day and as we were talking I said, "What are you working on today Larry?" And he said, "I am working on 1 Corinthians 15:29 and I have a list here of about 40 different views." I looked at his list and said, "Could I add one more to your list?" And so I gave him the view expressed by E.W. Bullinger. Bullinger was born in 1837 and one of the books he wrote is called, "How To Enjoy The Bible." It is there that I read this view.

Now before I read what he says, let me explain something important to you. Both the OT and the NT were originally written in a style of writing that has no punctuation and no word division. Let me show you what 1 Corinthians 15:20-34 looks like in English when done as the Old and New Testaments were in their language (OVERHEAD # 1 and # 2 our text in red letter).

There is another matter we must understand with regard to the view I am going to present to you. What we call the 'to be' verbs were generally left out as well. They were understood and not given in the text unless they wanted to stress some point. So look at 1 Corinthians 15:39-41 to note a few examples. In verse

39 the words 'is' and 'there is' are italicized meaning that they were left out in the original. Then in verse 40 the words 'are' and 'is' are italicized indicating they have been added in English. So, the 'to be' verbs are generally left out and must be added to make proper sense in English.

So, in light of what we have just seen, let me show you two translations of the words under question (# 3).

So, E.W. Bullinger says in the book I mentioned, "A wrong punctuation often leads to wrong translation and necessitates liberties which have to be taken in order to make sense." Let me explain what he means. If the punctuation is given incorrectly in a translation, then you have to explain that text in a way that it was not intended to be understood.

So, Bullinger says that when a verse is wrongly punctuated, it gives a wrong sense and then to explain it, you have to use uncalled for liberties. That, he says, is the case here. So, here is how he punctuates this verse, "Else, what are they doing who are being baptized? It is for the dead, if the dead rise not at all. Why are they then baptized for dead?"

So, I propose that the translation of this verse should read, "Otherwise (that is, if there is no resurrection) what will they do who are being baptized? Baptism is on behalf of the dead if the dead do not rise at all. Why are they then baptized on behalf of the dead?"

If that is the correct translation, and there is no reason why it could not be as far as grammar is concerned, that changes the whole dynamic of this verse. And so I want to now defend this translation from that dynamic.

## II. THE DEFENSE OF THIS PROPOSITION

### A. Defense From The New Meaning

If we take the translation of this verse that I have suggested, it changes the meaning of the verse

significantly. Here is the difference. The translation we have in the NKJV says, "Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead if the dead do not rise at all?" The translation as I propose it is, "Otherwise, what will they do who are being baptized? It is for the dead if the dead do not rise at all." This translation changes the whole dynamic of the verse, and I believe that this verse now falls in line with the rest of the context and the rest of Scripture. Nowhere does Scripture ever mention being baptized for the dead, except for this verse if it is translated as usual. In our translation, people are being baptized for the dead. In the proposed translation, people are simply being baptized.

So, in light of this proposed translation, let me give an explanation of this verse. It says that if there is no resurrection, then, what will those do (future tense) who are being baptized (present tense). Here is the question: If there is no resurrection, what will the people do who are being baptized? I might give it like this: How will a person who is being baptized live after he is baptized? What are they to do?

Here is the dilemma. We are justified by Christ's death on our behalf. But we are sanctified by His resurrection. The NKJV translates Romans 4:25, which speaks of Christ, like this: "...who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification." He died on behalf of our offenses. It was our sins He died for. But He was resurrected on behalf of our justification. When the price for our sins was paid for, He was resurrected. This resurrection is for our sanctification.

Now here is the question of our text: If there is no resurrection, how are they to live who are being baptized? There is no sanctification. There is no victory over sin. If that is the case, then they are baptized on behalf of the dead, and what is the use in that? There is no life! There is no victory!

Now let me make this point: If there is a resurrection, and if Christ was raised from the dead, then baptism is on behalf of the living, not on

behalf of the dead. Baptism benefits other living Christians, not dead ones! You see, the words 'the dead' in our passage are plurals. It speaks of others who are dead. But baptism benefits other Christians, that is those who are alive. When a person repents of his or her sins and believes in Christ by faith, they then make a public display to others in baptism which says, "Christanus sumi". That means, 'I am a Christian!' I have taken my stand for Christ and against the world, against the flesh and against the devil. "Christanus sumi." Baptism is not for the dead. It is for the living!

And when I say, "Christanus sumi", now the resurrection becomes my hope for life. Let me ask you what it would do for you if you heard the story of Jesus and you heard that He was not raised from the dead? Would you believe in Him? What if you were told He died for you to justify you from your sins and you could be forgiven by believing in Him, but when you die, you are gone. There is no resurrection. Would you repent? Would you believe? Would you be baptized? No! it is for the dead if the dead do not rise at all, and why be baptized for the dead? That makes no sense at all.

And I believe Jesus Christ died for my justification, but He lives for my sanctification. Now let me ask you this: What would you do if you heard that Jesus died for your sins and He will justify you if you repent and believe, and He was raised to give you victory over sin here in this life, and that if you live and believe you will never die. You will go to glory and when Christ comes He will resurrect your body and you will be whole again. As Peter shared in his testimony. He may never walk again in this life, but he will walk and jump again in glory. I ask you, would you repent and believe with that kind of hope?

And so I want to share two matters for which the resurrection is of utmost importance to the Christian life. The first value is in this life here on earth. If there is no resurrection then Christ was not resurrected and if Christ was not resurrected, then the believer has no overcoming power to live a righteous life in the present. You see, baptism pictures the believer's death with Christ; the

believer's burial with Christ, and the believer's resurrection with Christ! And the believer's resurrection with Christ gives that sanctifying power that the believer needs to live in victory.

So, when the believer is pictured in baptism as having been raised with Christ, that speaks of the believer being empowered to live a righteous life. It is only by the resurrected life that the believer can experience victory over sin. Christ reigns in the life of the believer through Christ's own resurrection and He empowers the believer through this resurrection. If there is no resurrection, what will they do who are baptized? They have no overcoming power.

So, we go to Romans 6 (read 1-6). Now note verse 4. It says, "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." As Christ was raised to newness of life at the resurrection, so we should be raised to newness of life when we become believers and are baptized. You see, we are to be baptized when we are saved. The symbol of baptism shows that we have died with Christ and that we have been buried with Him. That is justification. But then baptism also shows that we have been raised with Him; raised to newness of life. The saved life. That is sanctification.

So, here is the question of our text if I have translated it correctly. "If there is no resurrection, what will believers do who are being baptized?" When a person has been justified, saved, and thus baptized, what will they do in their Christian life if there is no resurrection? They have been baptized to show death, burial and resurrection, but if there is no resurrection there is also no resurrection power to live a new life. So what are they going to do who are baptized?

You see, 6:5 says, "For if we have been united together (with Christ) in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection..." We are not talking about some day in the future. We are talking about here and now! We are

here talking about our likeness of His resurrection in our life right now! We have been raised, in picture form, to newness of life! The problem with so many Christians is that they claim to have died with Christ and to have been raised with Him, but their life is not changed!

Now notice verse 6 which says, "...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." We died with Christ, that the body of sin, this body in which we sin, the flesh through which the sin nature works, might be done away with. All this is so that we should live in newness of life, resurrection life. And how do we know when we live in newness of life, resurrection life? Our verse tells us. It is when we are no longer slaves to sin. How does that work in life? This is the process of sanctification. Day by day we deal with sin until we get the victory over it. And then as new sins emerge, we gain the victory over them. Now this is only possible through resurrection life, and if there is no resurrection, what shall they do who are baptized? Resurrection life is what the final part of baptism pictures.

So, let us consider Galatians 2:20 in this light. Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me (resurrection life); and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." First he says, "I have been crucified with Christ..." And then he says, "I still live, but it is no longer I who lives. It is Christ who now lives in me." That is the benefit of the resurrection in the here and now.

I have shared with you several times the little reading I renamed, "Seven Evidences of The Crucified Life." Let me say this: every evidence of a crucified life is also an evidence of resurrection life. This is what the final point in baptism pictures. When we say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ", what does that mean? Well, it means the death of the self life, the life controlled by the sin nature. And how does that life reveal itself in the way I live? Well, here is point number: "When you are forgotten,

or neglected, or purposely set at naught, and you don't sting and hurt with the insult or the oversight but your heart is content and restful in Christ, THAT IS AN EVIDENCE OF THE CRUCIFIED LIFE." Now I would add, that is also an evidence of the resurrected life.

Now, when we come to the point where we can be forgotten, or neglected, or purposely set at naught, and we don't sting and hurt with the insult or the oversight but our heart is content and restful in Christ, we know the old self has been crucified in those areas of our lives. But it is also an evidence of the resurrected life. So we can now say with Paul with regard to these areas, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." When I sting and hurt when people say things about me, though those things may not be true, yet it is a sign of the sinful self life.

Let me tell you something about stinging and being hurt. I will not say I will always have the victory. But I can say I am learning the victory. When something like what I read happens to me and I feel that familiar hurt feeling I immediately go to the cross and I ask God to help me overcome. I realize when that happens that something of my old self life has been revealed and it needs to be nailed to the cross and die. I cannot tell you what a selfish creature I am. But I can also tell you what the cross and resurrected life can do!

The second point in that little reading was, "When your good is evil spoken of, when your wishes are crossed, your advice disregarded, your opinions ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself, but take it all in patient loving silence, THAT IS AN EVIDENCE OF THE CRUCIFIED LIFE." You see, that old rugged cross slays self and when self has been slain, self no longer responds negatively to such things. Oh to live the victorious Christian life! And I ask you, is this possible? Only through experiencing the cross and resurrection with Christ.

Now let me say here that there is never a time when you do not make a correction or admonish a fellow believer. But when the old self live is in control, it must die. When you say to yourself, "Listen, you will not get away with that." Or, "Just wait, I will get you." Or, "Oh no you don't" etc..., then you know there is a need for the cross.

The third point was, "When you lovingly and politely bear any disorder, any irregularity, any unpunctuality, or any annoyance; when you can stand face to face with waste, folly, extravagance, spiritual insensibility...and endure it as JESUS endured it, THAT IS AN EVIDENCE OF THE CRUCIFIED LIFE."

Now all these points give us some idea of what the crucified life is all about. But, on the other hand, they show us what the resurrected life is like. When we come to such a point we can say with Paul, "I have learned to be content in whatever state I am."

The fourth point is: "When you are content with any food, any offering, any raiment, any climate, any society, any solitude, and interruption by the will of GOD, THAT IS AN EVIDENCE OF THE CRUCIFIED LIFE." It is simply easy to complain. It is easy to be negative. "Oh, I wish it would quit snowing for once." But when we truly live the crucified life, we also truly live the resurrected life! The resurrected life gives me victory over the sin nature.

The fifth point was, "When you never care to refer to yourself in conversation, or to record your own good works, or itch after commendation, when you can truly love to be unknown, THAT IS AN EVIDENCE OF THE CRUCIFIED LIFE." Is it not simply amazing how deeply engrained the old self life is? It takes divine power to overcome the self life. It takes resurrection power. And if there is no resurrection, what will they do who are baptized? How shall they live? If there is no resurrection, there is no resurrection power to live right.

Point six says, "When you can see your brother prosper and have his needs met, and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy nor

question GOD, while your own needs are far greater and in desperate circumstance, THAT IS AN EVIDENCE OF THE CRUCIFIED LIFE." Well, that is also an evidence of the resurrected life, the life pictured by baptism. How can we come to such a point in life where we can see our brother prosper and have his needs met, and we can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy nor question GOD, while our own needs are far greater and in desperate circumstance? We can only do this when we have died with Christ and been raised with Him. It takes resurrection power to live like that.

And the last point was, "When you can receive correction and reproof from one of less stature than yourself, and can humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, finding no rebellion or resentment rising up within your heart, THAT IS AN EVIDENCE OF THE CRUCIFIED LIFE." Some of us find it hard to receive correction or reproof from someone of greater stature than ourselves, never mind from someone of lesser stature than ourselves. And when we react negatively it is an open evidence of an un-crucified, un-resurrected life.

And so, at the conclusion of that little reading I added these verses, "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (Rom. 6:4-6).

And so, our verse in 1 Corinthians 15 closes like this: "Otherwise, that is, if there is no resurrection, what will they do who are being baptized? It is for the dead if the dead do not rise at all. Why then are they baptized for the dead?" Now it is of note that the phrase, 'the dead' is in the plural in the original language. If there is no resurrection, baptism is for those who have already died. And, just what is the use in that? But, since there is a resurrection, then baptism is not for the

dead but for the living. It is to those who are alive that we show by baptism that we have died with Christ, been buried with Him and have been raised with Him. It is these living believers that will hold us accountable to our testimony of baptism, not the dead.

CONCL: Well, I must conclude. If there is no resurrection, what will they do who are being baptized? There is no hope for them for victory over sin in this life, nor is there hope of a new body in glory. Baptism is for the dead if there is no resurrection and of what value is that?

I was going to tell you about the second value of the resurrected life. Jesus said, "He that lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" You see, the first value is that we can have overcoming power over sin here in this life in Christ. We can quit smoking. We can quit drugs or alcohol or swearing or stealing. Homo sexuals can find victory over their sin. Nobody is born a homo sexual or a thief or any other sin. We become that by sinning. Some of us have a bent towards certain sins and others towards other sins. No sin cannot be helped. In Christ, every captive can be set free.