

1Corinthians 15:29-34 "Have You Lost Your Senses?"

1CO 15:29-34 "Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? 30 And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? 31 I die every day - I mean that, brothers -just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. 32 If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."
33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." 34 Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God - I say this to your shame."

The context in which we find our text this morning is still dealing with the resurrection of believers who have trusted in Jesus Christ who paid our debt at the cross, and then secured that salvation through His bodily resurrection from the dead.

Paul's argument has been that if the dead are not raised then Christ has not been raised either since Jesus was as much a man as any human being in all of history, as well as being the very Son of God.

And so, if men are not raised from the dead, then the man Christ Jesus could not have been raised either and we are still in our sin since His claim was that He was our only hope of being reconciled back to the Father.

And so, as we come to our text this morning Paul is bringing up one more example of a practice in the church at Corinth which is not consistent with their belief system. Their belief system, (at least among a group there in Corinth), was that men in general are not going to be physically raised from the dead.

Paul makes the point that if this is the case then why are you practicing a form of baptism which speaks to the very resurrection you deny?

Now the problem here in the beginning of our text has to do with this particular baptism Paul brings up. And admittedly, there are no clear cut answers as to exactly what Paul means by this baptism for the dead. Let's look at the text.

1CO 15:29 "Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?"

This sounds pretty strange. How can living people be baptized for someone who is dead? Actually, a more literal translation would be, "what will those do who are baptized [on behalf of] the dead?"

And so, the text is clearly saying that this is a proxy baptism, or a vicarious baptism where, when the person was living, they apparently didn't have the chance to be water baptized or refused baptism, but now, after their death, a living person will be baptized on behalf of this dead person so that the dead person will now have baptism put to their account.

Still confused? Yeah, so are most people. So, what does all of this mean in light of Paul's exhortation that these Corinthian believers accept and live in the reality that they, along with all believers, will one day be resurrected from the dead?

Well, whenever we come to a difficult passage like this there are certain rules of interpretation. In the world of Theology this is referred to as hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is simply the science of interpretation, especially as it relates to the Scriptures.

The rule of interpretation which we'll look at here regarding our text is the rule which essentially states that whenever we come upon a hard saying in Scripture we let the rest of the Scriptures address it by allowing the less clear passage to be defined by a more clear passage.

The less clear passage is what we have before us this morning which speaks of being baptized for the dead. A more clear passage would be those Scriptures which address baptism and its proper use.

Without spending a lot of time on our text and getting bogged down here let me say at the outset that there are no clear cut answers to defining what the baptism for the dead is here in first century Corinth. That's the hard part. The easy part is defining what it is not.

And so, in our investigative approach to interpreting this passage we know from the start what it is not from other portions of God's word. A lot of people will take a passage like this and build all sorts of strange doctrines on this verse. The Mormons for example

have a baptism for the dead where they try and secure salvation for dead family members who are not Mormon.

The idea is that they believe in a sort of baptismal regeneration. According to their belief system, simply being watered baptized can actually secure salvation whether you're dead or alive. Well, if this is the case we could eliminate evangelism with the gospel of Jesus Christ, build a big pool and spend the rest of our days staying wet for Jesus as we continually get baptized for other people in the world.

Is this what the word of God teaches? Absolutely not. Any form of baptismal regeneration, where you simply go through the act of water baptism, does not do anything for securing our salvation, be it the Mormons, the Roman Catholics or the Church of Christ who all believe in some form of baptismal regeneration.

This type of teaching allows the person to work his or her way to heaven and Paul clearly tells us that "it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." (EPH 2:8-9)

And so, Paul could not be addressing a form of baptism in Corinth which allows a proxy baptism for the dead whereby those dead could be saved through this act. He also could not be teaching that this is a normative practice for the church then or today.

Nowhere else in the word of God are we even given a hint that we should be baptized for the dead. Even the church Fathers in the second and third centuries agree that such a teaching is abhorrent as they were dealing with heresies during their time where some people were teaching such things.

John MacArthur points out that "if one person's faith cannot save another, then certainly one person's baptism cannot save another. Baptism is simply an act of obedient faith that proclaims identity with Christ (Rom.6:3-4). No one is saved by baptism -- not even living persons, much less dead ones."

HEB 9:27 "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment..."

And so, despite the fact that it might be difficult to understand exactly what Paul means by this baptism for the dead, it is very easy to understand what he is not saying.

Now, some have suggested that this baptism for the dead had to do with some sort of ceremonial procedure for those believers who died before they were given the opportunity to be water baptized.

And so, their relatives or friends, not wanting them to lack the benefit of outwardly demonstrating their faith, would do it on their behalf thus declaring that their friend or relative was most certainly identified with Christ's life, death and resurrection as they believed on the Lord when they were alive.

But even this is not taught in the word of God and would not be promoted as the norm by the apostle Paul.

Whatever this practice was it was not something which was accepted widely throughout the Christian world and evidently was not something which Paul seems too concerned with since he doesn't rebuke them for this.

So, evidently they were not using it as a means to get some "unbelieving" dead relative into heaven, or using it to assure some dead "believing" relative would get to heaven as though they needed baptism to help them get there, along with faith in Christ.

We know that Paul seemed to think this was a sort of odd-ball belief since he doesn't really want to whole-heartedly identify the Corinthian believers with such a practice even though some in the church there may have advocated it.

You'll notice that in verse 29 he doesn't use the first person in identifying this practice. In other words he doesn't say to them, "what will *you* do, *you* who are baptized for the dead? Rather, he uses the third person when he says, "what will *those* do who are baptized for the dead?, or what will *they* do, who are baptized for the dead?

And so, Paul intentionally makes a separation by suggesting that if someone, whether outside or inside your particular church does this practice, what benefit will it bring if the dead are not raised bodily from the grave?

And this is really the issue, because what does water baptism teach us? Well, it teaches us that we have been identified with everything Jesus Christ has done on our behalf as it relates to our salvation.

It is an outward sign which addresses an inward spiritual reality. And the reality is what Paul had taught the Romans.

ROM 6:3-5 "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. 5 ***If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.***"

And so now we come full circle. Paul says, 'why are you practicing this ritual act when you don't fully believe in the general resurrection of all men? In the very practice of water baptism you are saying that not only are you identified with Christ's death and burial for the remission of your sins, but you are also saying through this act that you are identified with His resurrection, thus saying that you will one day be resurrected just like Christ.'

'Your actions do not align with your belief. Get your belief right before your wrong beliefs begin to adversely affect your actions.'

And then Paul goes on to say how absurd it is to speak of the resurrection of the dead if there is no hope of resurrection.

1CO 15:3-320 "And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? 31 I die every day - I mean that, brothers -just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. 32 If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Paul is essentially saying that a proper understanding of the resurrection will affect the way we live, just as a denial of the resurrection will affect our lives. In other words, if we deny the resurrection and believe that men are not to be raised from the dead, then we deny our future and conclude that we have none.

If this is the case then Paul says, 'I'm the biggest idiot of all. Why in the world would I put my life in danger for the sake of Christ and the gospel if there is no resurrection?'

And the answer is, no one who is in their right mind would, unless of course they're masochists and like getting beat up and abused for a lie.

1CO 15:31 "I die every day - I mean that, brothers -just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul is saying that he is telling the truth about his adventures regarding how his life is in constant danger. That's what he means when he says, "just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord."

He says, he dies every day. This is kind of a play on words here from Paul as he compares this daily death to the hope of resurrection. He doesn't literally mean that he dies each day and at the end of the day the Lord brings him back to life. He means this metaphorically. He means that he dies to self each day as he seeks to do the Lord's work, even at the risk of being harmed.

And his point is, why would I do this? Why would I risk my life if there is no life beyond the grave?

1CO 15:32 "If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Notice how closely Paul associates the teaching of the resurrection with our eternal destiny. He's saying we have no eternal destiny in the presence of God without the resurrection. This makes the resurrection of Christ and all men pretty important.

But here Paul is saying that I gain nothing if I fight wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons. Now, some have suggested that Paul is talking about literally fighting wild beasts in Ephesus while being forced into the arena to take on lions or wild dogs as in the days where Christians were being persecuted through their martyrdom.

A couple of things would suggest that this isn't the case. Paul is writing this letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus around the year AD 54 during his third missionary journey. He's not in prison at this time and won't be for another 6 years or so.

He's not undergoing the type of persecution from the hands of Nero at this time who purposed to destroy all Christians in the Roman empire. Nero came to power in this same year of AD 54. It would be later in his reign when he enacted such practices of persecution of Christians.

The other reason we know Paul would not have been thrown to the lions is that by law a Roman citizen could not be subjected to such torture and death. This was reserved for slaves and foreigners. Paul was a Roman citizen, and he points this out to the authorities.

ACT 22:25-29 "As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" 26 When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen." 27 The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes, I am," he answered. 28 Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship." "But I was born a citizen," Paul replied. 29 Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains."

And so, when Paul uses the phrase, "if I fight wild beasts," he's talking about having to contend with people who are coming against his work for Christ. In fact, he points this out in his second letter to these same Corinthians.

2CO 1:8-10 "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us..."

What's interesting is that both Peter and Jude, Jesus' half -brother, use similar phrases regarding wild beasts in describing people who come against the kingdom of God.

2PE 2:12 "But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish."

JUD 1:10 "Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals - these are the very things that destroy them."

Paul wants these Corinthians to know that the very city in which he is writing this letter to them has people who want to destroy him. And his point is why would I risk my life for you if I am not doing it first and foremost for the risen Christ who assures me that I too will join Him and be assured of my future resurrection?

If there is no resurrection then there is no hope and future with Christ. "If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Paul is quoting the prophet of Isaiah who brought the words of God to Israel and warned them to repent of their sin and humble themselves before God instead of trying to fix their own problems as if God didn't exist.

ISA 22:10-13 "You counted the buildings in Jerusalem and tore down houses to strengthen the wall. 11 You built a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the Old Pool, but you did not look to the One who made it, or have regard for the One who planned it long ago. 12 The Lord, the LORD Almighty, called you on that day to weep and to wail, to tear out your hair and put on sackcloth. 13 But see, there is joy and revelry, slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine! ***"Let us eat and drink," you say, "for tomorrow we die!"***

Israel had no regard for God or His promises of deliverance. They disregarded God, and Paul is saying to reject God's teaching on our future with the Lord is to do the same thing the Israelites did, and to take the same attitude. In fact, Paul is saying that we really ought to do this if there is no resurrection.

It would be foolish to follow God and serve the Lord if there is no resurrection because it is the Lord who is saying on the one hand that there is a resurrection and yet we all know that there isn't. Why follow such a lying God?

You might as well enjoy your present life because there is nothing beyond the grave. But you know, you can't have it both ways. You can't say that we'll live in spiritual, non-physical bodies before God forever, and deny the resurrection because that is not God's plan. Because you see, if we are promoting something God teaches, which turns out to be false in one area, then we cannot trust God in any other area.

And so, do your own thing and do it with all the gusto you have. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

Is that the way we want to live, with no hope of being with our Lord? Or do we want to waste our days serving an imaginary Savior? And so, Paul is making a very strong statement here by suggesting that his entire life in Christ has been a waste, if there is no resurrection.

But neither he nor the Corinthians can live with that proposition, because they know that Paul's life has been instrumental in bringing them to Christ. And so, this is a strong rebuke for them to get back on the right path, to properly promote the Savior, and to be that living witness in their communities.

1CO 15:33-34 "Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." 34 Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God - I say this to your shame."

To reject any aspect of the resurrection of Christ, and all men, is to be misled according to Paul. And to be misled regarding the truth will corrupt our ability to live a life that brings glory to God.

I've heard it said, and I've shared it here on occasion; bad doctrine produces bad lives.

That's essentially what Paul is saying. There are those who suggest that doctrine isn't important. They would not last long with Paul. He wouldn't put up with such a notion. To reject the resurrection of believers is bad doctrine, and as such it produces bad lives in the sense that this physical world and our physical bodies don't need to be concerned with holiness since only the spirit is what counts.

That was the Greek thought of Paul's day. As a result, it was apparent that many of these believers in Corinth were thinking only of themselves to the exclusion of anyone else. Thus you had divisions, and strife, immorality and such because what you did you did for yourself with little concern for others.

After all, our bodies are put in the grave and what we did in and with our bodies makes no difference. Paul says, yes it does. Remember what he told the Ephesians?

EPH 2:10 "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

These works are works we do in our bodies and spirits and we do them to the glory of Christ. To place ourselves in a position of bad company, as Paul's suggests in verse 33, is to put ourselves in a position of being corrupted in such a way where we will not be effective servants for Christ, thus bringing dishonor to our Lord.

This bad company includes any ungodly influence from the world. But in the context here it really is pin-pointed to those in the

church who claim to have knowledge and yet have an incorrect knowledge which is being promoted and is therefore detrimental to the body of Christ.

In fact, the word for company as it's found in our text, "Bad company corrupts good character," is the Greek word *homilia* and it's where we get our English word homily. The word homily is another word for sermon. Thus seminary students are all required to take a course in homiletics, the learning of how to preach.

Paul is saying that to hook up with someone who has an agenda of preaching to you bad doctrine will inevitably find yourself being corrupted, which will in turn effect your character.

Bad doctrine always does this. The health and wealth gospel is a classic case in our day of how bad doctrine corrupts good character. To suggest that being saved is a guarantee through our faith that we can have any temporal blessing is to miss the point of what salvation is really all about. After all, Christ Himself told us that His kingdom is not of this world. It's not about temporal stuff.

And yet, how many people become consumed with this false teaching to the degree that they ultimately become discouraged because they discover that they don't get everything in this world that they want, and before they know it their faith is called into question and when that happens they often wonder about their own salvation and in many cases leave the church because they can't handle the rejection of their "brothers and sisters" in Christ, who apparently are really spiritual, while they're not.

I can't tell you how many times I've talked with people over the years who have become devastated because of such false teaching and end up giving up for a time. The discouragement is more than they can handle and their witness for Christ is deemed to be ineffectual. Their spiritual character is shot.

Paul calls such teachings as sinful, not merely bad.

1CO 15:34 "Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God - I say this to your shame."

Paul is saying to these Corinthians that they've lost their senses, most importantly their spiritual senses, as they are not being sensitive to the things of the Spirit who has given us His word. And because they're moving in directions which are not according to the Spirit it is necessarily sinful.

Their sinfulness is directly related to their lack of knowledge of God and the things of God according to His word. This is what Paul means by the phrase, "there are some who are ignorant of God." He doesn't mean that they are ignorant about God, but of God and His ways and will.

The only effective way to get to know God is to learn of Him from the one place He has provided; His word. But the knowledge of God is more than knowing the facts, it's the dynamic relationship we have with the Lord through the truth of who Christ is.

We must seek the truth, live in the truth and give the truth in love to a dying world. This is the godly character the Holy Spirit is working out in our lives. And it is this truth that allows us to live in the hope of our future state with Christ through the resurrection.

May we never be accused of shamefully ignoring or pursuing God's truth, or walking in a way where we dishonor the One who is the truth and has given us life according to that truth. Remember, Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life and He expects every one of His children to exemplify that in the power of the Spirit to His glory.

And instead of shame we'll hear from our Lord, welcome good and faithful servant.