

Why then are they baptized for the dead? (1 Cor. 15:29 NKJ)

written by Alfred Persson | September 4, 2023



Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? (1 Cor. 15:29 NKJ)

The practice of vicarious baptism only existed among the Montanists in the early centuries. Mormons practice it today. The passage has generated over 400 different interpretations. I thought I'd make it 401.

Paul was a student of Gamaliel, a rabbi of the school of Hillel. The Rabbis often arranged their dialectic in a structure of three, to bring completeness and emphasis.

Rabbi Aqiba said...“Whoever eats unhealthy food transgresses thrice: he despises himself, as well as the food, and pronounces a benediction upon unwholesome things.”- Tosephtha, Aboth of R. Nathan, The Babylonian Talmud, (M. L. Rodkinson, trans.; Vol. 9a, p. 93). (1918).

“Wherefore is this repeated thrice? Infer from this, it is a merit that they be, first, equal in color; secondly, in stature; thirdly, in price.-The Babylonian Talmud.

An example of Paul arranging his sermon by Three is in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

Love never fails (1 Cor. 13:8-13)

1. Prophecies will fail
2. Tongues will fail
3. Knowledge will fail

Statement: We know in part and prophesy in part

1. When I was a child
2. I spoke as a child
3. I understood as a child

Statement: When I became a man I put away childish things

1. Now we see in a mirror dimly
2. Then face to face
3. Now I know in part

Statement: Then I shall know just as I am known

Conclusion:

And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor. 13:13 NKJ)

The arrangement in threes in 1 Corinthians 15

“If there is no resurrection” (1 Cor. 15:13-15)

- 1) Christ not risen;
- 2) Our preaching empty;
- 3) Their (the resurrection deniers) faith empty

Statement: We then are false witnesses

“If the Dead don’t rise” (1 Cor. 15:16-19)

- 1) Christ not risen;
- 2) your faith futile;
- 3) You are still in your sins

Statement: Then all who have fallen asleep have perished, and we of all men most pitiful.

“But now Christ is risen from the dead” (1 Cor. 15:20-24)

- 1) He is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep;
- 2) By man came death
- 3) By man came the resurrection of the dead

Statement: “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive”

“But each in his own order”: (1 Cor. 15:23-26)

- 1) Christ the first fruits;
- 2) those dead raised at Christ’s coming;
- 3) The rest of the dead in the End.

Statement: Christ will reign until he puts all enemies under his feet, last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Momentarily Paul departs from the argument to derail any foolish idea Christ’s reign would subject God forever to the risen humanity of Christ (1 Cor. 13:27-28).

The return:

Otherwise (1893 ἐπεὶ epei), what will they do (4160 ποιέω poieo) who are baptized for the dead (3498 νεκρός nekros) , if the dead (3498 νεκρός nekros) do not rise at all (3654 ὅλως holos)? Why (5101 τίς tis) then (2532 καί kai) are they baptized for the dead (3498 νεκρός nekros)?

That translation loses the flow of the argument, “otherwise” should have been translated “since” and then its clearly referring back to verse 26, Death the last enemy destroyed.

“Since” (1893 ἐπεὶ epei) [the dead rise], “what is produced (4160 ποιέω poieo, achieved, accomplished) by those baptized for the dead?” “If wholly dead (3654 ὅλως holos) are not raised up, what also(τί καὶ) [explains] being baptized for the dead?

“Dead” (3498 νεκρός nekros) is repeated thrice each time revealing the folly of the resurrection deniers, their illogic. Without a “good” to obtain, why are they being baptized if the dead don’t rise?

Paul then turns the illogic on himself:

Τί καὶ ἡμεῖς κινδυνεύομεν πᾶσαν ὥραν (1 Cor. 15:30 BYZ)

“What also [is our reason for] standing in danger every hour” [if the dead don’t rise?] (1 Cor. 15:30-32)

- 1)“Why die daily”
- 2) “Why fight beasts”
- 3) "What advantage exist for me if the dead don’t rise”

Statement: “If the dead do not rise, Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die!”

Therefore, vicarious baptism was not being practiced by anyone in Corinth. That explains the universal rejection of the “novelty” when the Montanists misinterpreted this verse.