

PLAIN SPEECH

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“Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech” (2 Cor. 3:12)

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TAKING A LOOK AT BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD

One Bible verse that sometimes troubles honest people is **1 Cor. 15:29**. Said passage reads: “*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?*” What are we to make of this verse?

Before dealing with the text itself, let me remind you that one method of study that’s very useful to genuine truth seekers is knowing what a particular passage cannot be teaching. Let me illustrate this method. I know that whatever is being discussed in **Rev. 20:1-6** cannot be a physical kingdom upon the earth because of **Jn. 18:36**. I know the tongue speaking of **Ax. 2:4** cannot be garbled gibberish because of **Ax. 2:6, 11**. I know the baptism noted in **Mk. 16:16** cannot be for infants in light of the fact that confession must be made prior to baptism (**Ax. 8:36-38**). I know **Gal. 3:28** cannot be teaching that women can be elders (bishops) by considering **1 Tim. 3:1-7**. I know the “*feasts of charity*” mentioned in **Jude 12** cannot be church-sponsored social meals because of **1 Cor. 11:17-34**. I know that “*Lucifer*” (**Isa. 14:12**) cannot refer to Satan because **Isa. 14:4, 15** shows that “*Lucifer*” was a figurative term God applied to an ancient man who was king of Babylon. Many more examples could be given.

Now let’s apply this elimination approach to **1 Cor. 15:29**. Yes, figure out what the passage cannot be teaching.

1 Cor. 15:29 cannot be teaching proxy baptism; i.e. baptizing a living person on behalf of a person who’s dead. This error is taught by the Mormons. Their own website (www.lds.org) shows how they abuse **1 Cor. 15:29**: “*Jesus Christ taught that baptism is essential to the salvation of all who have lived on earth. Many people, however, have died without being baptized. Others were baptized without proper authority. Because God is merciful, He has prepared a way for all people to receive the blessings of baptism. By performing proxy baptisms in behalf of those who have died, Church members offer these blessings to deceased ancestors. Individuals can then choose to accept or reject what has been done in their behalf*” (cf. **Doctrines & Covenants {D&C} 127:1-10; 128:1-18; 137:1-10; 138:6-19, 28-35, 58-60**).

The Mormon position on **1 Cor. 15:29** cannot be right. How so? #1 – in **2 Cor. 5:10** the same writer of **1 Cor. 15:29** wrote: “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*” No one will be judged on the basis of what someone else has done (cf. **Rom. 14:12**). #2 – When one accepts the words of Christ one knows that a person’s fate is sealed at the point of death (**Lk. 16:19-26**). There is no switching of states in the hadean realm. #3 – Jesus Himself taught there is no such thing as a transfer of obedience (**Mt. 25:1-13**). Game over! Mormons lose. Mormons will go on and on about modern day prophecy to justify their position, but even then the elimination method of study finds them weighed and wanting (**Jude 3; 1 Cor. 13:8-10**).

Okay, having seen what **1 Cor. 15:29** cannot be teaching, let’s see if we can figure out what is the import of the text.

In ancient Corinth there were amongst the saved some who denied a resurrection of the dead (**1 Cor. 15:12**). Concerned, the apostle Paul impressed upon the church at Corinth the foolishness of denying the resurrection and going along with the errorists.

First, Paul reminded them that he preached to them a verified message about the resurrection of Christ – one they had initially received – and without such they cannot be saved (**1 Cor. 15:1-11**).

Second, Paul told them that if there is no resurrection then Christ was not raised from the dead and, thus, there was no purpose in continuing on with Christianity, as it would be nothing more than a sham (**1 Cor. 15:13-17, 19**).

Third, Paul told them if there is no resurrection then those who died faithful to the Lord were without hope (**1 Cor. 15:18**).

Fourth, Paul explained that the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of all men is all part of a divine plan (**1 Cor. 15:20-28**).

This brings us to **vs. 29**. Here Paul continued doing what he had been doing all along in this section of text. He kept pointing out the foolishness of denying the resurrection. The point Paul was putting forth was simply this: “*Why be immersed into Christ if Christ was not raised from the dead. If the naysayers are right and there is no resurrection, then why are people baptized? Baptism is meaningless if Christ did not come forth from the grave*” (cf. **Rom. 6:1-5**). Paul was calling upon the saints in Corinth to reason themselves away from error (**vs. 12**).

In **vs. 30-32** Paul argued to his readers, “*If there is no resurrection (of Christ and eventually of all) then why do I and others suffer abuse and stand ready to die for the message?*” In **vs. 33-34, 58** Paul told his readers not to take the spreading cancer lightly.