

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Baptism For The Dead

(Jerry Fite)

When Paul is advocating for the bodily resurrection from the dead, what does he mean when he writes, “*Else what shall they do that are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?*” (*I Corinthians 15:29*)? Is Paul referring to a practice in his day where people were being baptized in the place of people who were not baptized in their life time, but now are dead? There is no evidence that such was occurring in Paul’s day (history records the practice beginning in the second century), but Joseph Smith made it a doctrine for the Mormons.

You will not read it commanded in the Book of Mormon, which is touted by Mormons as completing the Gospel of Christ, but baptism for the dead occurs later in Doctrine and Covenants (128:16). According to Smith, being baptized for dead family members, who were not baptized in their lifetime, is essential to their salvation and ours (D & C 128:15). They, according to Joseph Smith, cannot be “made perfect without us,” and we cannot “without our dead be made perfect.” Mormons are therefore motivated to gather at the baptismal

font, which Joseph Smith claims was instituted to connect the grave, the living and the dead together (D & C 128: 13) and be baptized for “our dead.” Strict record keeping of the dead family member’s name and the living relative’s vicarious baptism is important to Mormons. Joseph Smith relates “the records kept on earth” to that which is recorded in “the books” which will be opened at the final judgment (D & C 128:6, *Revelation 20: 12*).

Joseph Smith identifies the “record of their works” as being comprised with the “records which are kept on the earth” (D & C 128:7). This sly transition ignores the Scriptural truth that the works we will give answer to are the works we have “done in the body,” not what others have done for us after we have departed from the body (*2 Corinthians 5:10*).

Due to the context of v. 29, one might consider the baptism is the “baptism of suffering.” Jesus referred to His immersion in suffering unto death as a “baptism” He must “be baptized with” (*Mark 10:39, Lk.12:50*). It fits the context, for Paul speaks of his own trials to the point of dying daily and fighting beasts in Ephe-

sus (v. 31-32). The Greek preposition *huper*, translated “for,” can be interpreted “in behalf of,” or “in the place of” another.

If the dead are not raised, why would you take on your sufferings for Christ in the place where the present dead once stood? In other words, why would you be baptized for the dead? Paul sees himself “also” standing in “jeopardy every hour” and says, “If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (*I Corinthians 15:30-31*). Why stand in the place of suffering unto the realm of the dead if the dead are not raised?

But some might say, “Why take baptism in a figurative sense, when the usual meaning of baptism would fit the context? Being baptized into the death of Christ, one is not only dying to sin, but is also being raised with Christ in hope of eternal life after death. If Christ is not raised, we are only hoping in this life, therefore, men most pitiable (*I Corinthians 15:17-19*). Regarding the dead, why then be baptized if the dead are not raised? Does your interpretation contradict Scripture, like Joseph Smith’s, or harmonize with revealed Truth.