

Discovering Eternal Life

What It Means to Be Transformed for Heaven

Discovering the Supernatural Series - Part 7

1 Corinthians 15:12-34

12/3/22-12/4/22

Introduction

- **Afterlife Plans** – Some of us think of the life beyond this one as awesome. Some of us don't think about it at all. Some of us know that it's going to take a miracle for us to get to heaven. So, my question today is for you specifically, **what are your afterlife plans? We spend so much time planning for our future here in this life, but then what? Do you have any plans?**
 - **Decisions Today Impact** - The Bible tells us that not only are there only two destinations: with God or without God, but that **there are things that we can do today that shape how we walk into the next ('more tolerable', 'rewards')**. Do those factor into your life?
- **Hope to Live Through This One** – For Christians, those who rely on Jesus Christ as our Savior, we feel quite convinced that He can and will do what He said He will do: Save us. But until the day that we graduate from glory to greater glory we are still here, in this life, in this world. And sometimes it's difficult down here, right? Not always, but sometimes there are situations that are painful, scary or confusing. **Sometimes, our ability to get through TODAY is to think that it won't be like that TOMORROW. That means we have HOPE. How is your hope level today?**
 - **A Few Key Facts to Have Hope**
 - **Prepare a Place** - Jesus said that when He left this world He was going to prepare a place for His people so that we would be with Him.
 - **No Eye Seen** - The Bible says that no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor mind conceived what our eternal life is going to be like.
 - **Wiping Tears** - God says that in the end He will wipe away every tear and heal every wound so we can walk into the next world healthy, strong and vibrant.
 - **All of that is possible because of what Jesus Christ has done and will do...And it begins with His resurrection from the dead.**

Because Jesus ROSE Again, So Can WE

- **Recap: Pastor Judah** - The Purity of the Gospel and the Power of Grace
- **Set Up** – After all the drama in Corinth with bad leaders and false prophets and selfishness, things had become so messy that he needed to do some cleaning and resetting of foundation. As I just mentioned, first he laid the cornerstone of the gospel and now he's laying **the secondary level, the reality of the resurrection**.
 - **Do you know why you believe what you believe?** Do you really believe that?

Lesson

- **Spiritual Jenga**
 - **If the Resurrection is Bogus, Christianity Falls Apart**
 - **1st Corinthians 15:12-19** – *“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you¹ say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain². ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”*
 - **Now (as to the stupid comment that resurrection isn’t real)** – Paul is shifting gears a bit and laying another level of spiritual foundation. Clearly he is responding either to a direct question from the Corinthian congregation or responding to something that he heard is going on. Apparently **there were some leaders** (or perhaps influential congregants – otherwise, why take time to address it at all?) **who were saying that resurrection was not a thing**. To Paul this is absolutely absurd because it undermines everything about Christianity.
 - **A Most Serious If, Then** – **If there is no resurrection of the dead**, then Jesus didn’t resurrect. If Jesus didn’t resurrect, then He is not who He claimed to be. If He’s not the Messiah, then no one died for our sins. If no one died for our sins, we are still left dead in our sins, which means we are all going to hell. Therefore, resurrection is a non-negotiable, foundational truth of Christianity. **No resurrection = no forgiveness = eternal death.**
 - **Blasphemy** – No resurrection would mean that we, as Christians, have been saying things about the Bible and about God that are lies. We are misrepresenting God and that is a terrible thing to do.
 - **Eternal Death for Loved Ones who have Passed** – **this premise isn’t just theoretical or academic**...if there’s no resurrection then no one goes to heaven, including all of those you love that have died before you.
 - **If we only have Hope for Today, we are to be most pitied** – Why would Paul say this? Haven’t we been told for the last two thousand years that living a Christian life is the best version of living? Haven’t we been told that even if we are wrong, we will still be pleased with the healthy, moral, kind life that we lived? As opposed to the destructive life of active sinning, a holy Christian life has benefit and blessing, right? So, **why** should we be most pitied?
 - **Yes, there’s Blessing, but...** - Yes, there is a blessing to living as a Christian both to us and those around us, but **ONLY if any of it matters**. If there is no

¹ “Although this is the position of only “some among you,” most likely the “some” are the same as those in 4:18 and elsewhere (e.g., 9:3 who have had a significant influence within the community and are responsible for its prevailing anti-Pauline sentiment.” Gordon Fee, NICNT Commentary

² “more likely Paul already has in mind the causal connection between Christ’s resurrection and that of believers. That is, to deny the resurrection of the dead is to deny the resurrection of the one who makes any and all resurrections possible.” Gordon Fee, NICNT

God, if there is no meaning, then morality and goodness as a concept falls apart. If we are ultimately accidents from the primordial ooze and will become nothing but wormfood, we would have needed to live a very, very different lifestyle. **Our entire existence as Christians is contingent upon a future reality.** We do what we do with the assumption that there is something higher than us and more valuable for us, in the future. We are kind because we believe that God has told us to be kind. We are forgiving because we believe that God forgave us. We are loving because we think that it's in our nature and expected of us from God. We put off happiness in this life because we are wanting the better one later. We delay gratification with the expectation that something greater is in store. But if all of that is a lie and non-existent, then we should be on a different plan.

- **We should have bet on a different Messiah/Savior – if there's no resurrection and Christ didn't rise, then we have the wrong savior.** We have the wrong Messiah. We have misunderstood God and how reality works. This means that we should have put our trust in something or someone else. Currently, Paul isn't saying that someone is arguing against the existence of God, only against the resurrection. So, in this argument, there is still a God but clearly we don't know what He's like or what He wants, or our place in His plan, or have any hope in the afterlife.
- **Paul's Christianity vs. Ours – this statement should make us stop and think.** If we only view Christianity through the lens of an add-on to make our life better and take all the easy and good parts of Christianity but ignore the rest, we struggle to understand that Paul is saying. **True Christianity costs us.** It's sacrificial. It's painful. It's scary. It involves persecution. Are we seeing the same cost as Paul? I'm not talking about the violence, that depends on the nation and generation we live in. I'm talking about the high cost. Jesus said we needed to deny ourselves and take up our cross daily to follow Him. That doesn't sound like an add-on to make our lives easier for us. It sounds like it's difficult and sacrificial. It's when you live THAT WAY that you can easily say, if it's all bogus, then I should be pitied.

- **Christ the Firstfruit**

- **Jesus Resurrected and is Continuing to Settle Matters**

- **1st Corinthians 15:20-27a** – *“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”* ²¹ *For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.* ²² *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive*³. ²³ *But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits⁴, then at his*

³ “Both the context and Paul’s theology as a whole make it clear that in saying “in Christ all will be made alive,” he means “in Christ all *who are in Christ* will be made alive.” The lack of such a qualifier in the sentence itself is the result of both the balanced style and the fact that he expected it to be read in the context of his argument with them, not as a piece of abstract theology. In the present context these two sentences are still part of his response to vv. 17–19, begun in v. 20. In v. 18 Paul referred to “those who have fallen asleep in Christ,” making it certain that even that paragraph was concerned only with the resurrection of believers.” NICNT Commentary

⁴ “He does this first by calling Christ the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”¹⁴ Although this term has a rich OT history, Paul’s interest is not in its biblical overtones,¹⁶ which have to do with consecrating the firstfruits of the harvest to God (cf. Lev. 23:9–14), but in its function as a

coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign⁵ until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death⁶. ²⁷ For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet."

- **Fact: Christ HAS Been Resurrected** – that is a critical fact that we need to have thought through, studied and owned.
- **Evidence of the Resurrection⁷ – a brief review⁸**
 - **12 post-resurrection appearances**
 1. 1st to **Mary Magdalene** (a woman), who could see, touch and hold Him.
 2. **Group of Women** – they saw (visual confirmation of physical resurrection), and touched His feet, heard Him speak.
 3. To **Peter** (1 Cor 15:5) initially. He saw empty tomb, grave clothes. Heard him and interacted with Him.
 4. **2 Disciples on the Road to Emmaus** – interaction verbally and physical confirmation (hear and see).
 5. To the **10 disciples** (Thomas absent) – heard, seen, touched and saw Him eat fish.
 6. To the **11 (with Thomas) a week later**. Thomas touched Him as well as see and hear and interact with Him.
 7. To the **7 disciples fishing in Galilee** – breakfast and interactions. Peter's walk on the beach (feed my sheep)
 8. To group of disciples for **Great Commissioning** – seen and clearly heard and saw Him rise up into the sky.
 9. **To 500+ at the same time** – no details of account are given, just the reference.
 10. To **James** – Jesus' brother. James became a pillar of the church after being an unbeliever.

metaphor for the first of the harvest serving as a kind of guarantee for the full harvest. In his usage, therefore, the metaphor functions similarly to that of the "down payment" or "earnest money" of the Spirit in 2 Cor. 1:22 and 5:5 (cf. Eph. 1:14); both serve as a present pledge on the part of God for the final eschatological harvest or payment. Thus the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2:13) and the household of Stephanas (1 Cor 16:15) are the "firstfruits" in a given geographical area, which means not only that they are the first converts but the first of a much larger harvest that is yet to be realized. So too with Christ. He is God's "firstfruits," God's own pledge that there will be a full harvest of those who will be raised from the dead. By calling Christ the "firstfruits," Paul is asserting by way of metaphor that the resurrection of the believing dead is absolutely inevitable; it has been guaranteed by God himself." Gordon Fee, NICNT

⁵ "Paul thus begins by picking up the theme of "Christ's rule" from v. 24. This rule is currently in effect, but at "the end," when he has destroyed all the powers, he will "hand [it] over to God the Father." Paul now puts that into biblical perspective. Christ's rule, which by implication began with his resurrection (or subsequent ascension), *must continue* until Ps. 110:1 is fulfilled, "until he has put all his enemies under his feet." NICNT

⁶ "Through the Fall Adam began the process of *death* (note that emphasis in both vv. 21 and 22); that process has now been overturned through the Resurrection, which means that by raising Christ from the dead God has in fact triumphed over death. The problem is that despite Christ's resurrection (= triumph over death), believers still die. Hence they *must* be raised, (a) because they are "in Christ," who is already raised, and (b) only so will death, the last enemy, finally be subdued, so that through the work of Christ God will finally be "all in all." The argument in the rest of this paragraph makes it clear that this is Paul's real concern." NICNT

"The sentence literally reads, "The last enemy is being destroyed, namely death." The difficulty lies with the present tense and passive voice of the verb, plus the fact that no conjunction or particle joins it to what has preceded." NICNT

⁷ "During the first eleven appearances alone Jesus appeared to more than 500 people over a forty-day period of time (Acts 1:3). On all twelve occasions Jesus was seen and probably heard. Four times he offered himself to be touched. He was definitely touched twice. Jesus revealed his crucifixion scars on two occasions. In four testimonies the empty tomb was seen, and twice the empty grave clothes were viewed. On another four occasions almost certainly Jesus ate food. The sum total of this evidence is overwhelming confirmation that Jesus arose and lived in the same visible, tangible, physical body of flesh and bones he had possessed before his resurrection body." Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics, Norman Geisler

⁸ "Summary of the Evidence. Evidence for the resurrection of Christ is compelling. There are more documents, more eyewitnesses, and more corroborative evidence than for any other historical event of ancient history. The secondary, supplementary evidence is convincing; when combined with the direct evidence, it presents a towering case for the physical resurrection of Christ. In legal terminology, it is "beyond all reasonable doubt." Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics, Norman Geisler

11. To a **group at His Ascension** (Acts 1:4-8) – saw him, heard him and ate with him. Jesus gave them ‘many convincing proofs that he was alive (Acts 1:3), over a period of 40 days.
12. To **Paul the Apostle** – literal appearance not a vision.
 - **Empty Tomb** – He went somewhere. No evidence provided to conflict resurrection claim. No body produced. The enemies of the cross could have produced a body and shut the Christians down but they didn’t and couldn’t.
 - **Transformed Lives** – from scared and skeptical to bold and willing to be martyred (never for a known lie⁹). The whole launch of the Christian Church is evidence.
 - **Consistent Core Content of Gospel Message** – shared by all in the early church.
- **Christ’s Resurrection was the firstfruits** – It doesn’t mean that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead. He wasn’t. It doesn’t speak to the fact that Jesus was the first one resurrected that went to the right hand of the Father (direct to heaven), although He was. Paul’s simple point is that **Jesus was the first of a much larger harvest to come**. When He rose it changed everything and in His train would come all the rest of us (including those righteous who had died prior and were waiting in Paradise for Him).
- **By a Man came death & by a Man Came Resurrection** - by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. **God worked THROUGH humanity to rescue humanity. Humanity broke it, humanity needed to be part of the solution to fix it. Jesus BECAME** (took on) flesh when He came here to be our champion and substitution in death.
 - **Jesus Christ was the new Adam** – The corollary of Jesus and Adam doesn’t end simply in their connection with break and fix. **Jesus did what Adam should have done. Adam had trial and temptation and chose self. Jesus had trial and temptation and chose the Father’s will.** Jesus was the perfect ‘head of humanity’ that we needed. He was our true champion whereas Adam failed.
 - **in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive** – **This does not mean that all people will be saved or taken to heaven.** Paul already set down a precedent in his argument over and over that **ONLY those who trust in Christ will be made alive**, so that caveat is assumed here. We can’t take lines of scripture or points out of context.
 - **The end = when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father** – At some point Jesus is going to finish and accomplish what He was always going to do (by coming down here to rescue His people). **He will destroy all enemies and present it all completed to the Father.** Therefore, **Jesus is still shutting things down and**

⁹ “It can be argued that people will gladly die for a cause so long as they believe it is right even if, in fact, it is wrong. But they will never die for a cause they know is false. It is ludicrous to believe that the apostles willingly forfeited the comforts of life, their jobs and family, and their financial security and instead accepted ridicule, persecution, imprisonment, torture, and in many cases horrible deaths all the while knowing Jesus’ resurrection was a fabrication. No. They knew He was alive, risen from the dead, and it was that knowledge that propelled them to live for Him at all costs.” Defending Your Faith, by Dan Story

doing kingdom work (destroying the works of the devil and forcing the submitting of all that is rebellious against God). In the end He will wash His hands with a job well done.

- **The last enemy is death** – in what sense? **Death was the consequence of rebellion and disobedience to God. It was what God was trying to avoid for His people. Satan was simply a pawn** in that process. Therefore, **the true thing that God is trying to reconcile and FIX, is the eternal death of His people** (thus separation from Him). The enemy is not really the devil at this point. Although he is An enemy, he is no longer a threat. Jesus Christ not only triumphed over him on the cross and set him to open shame, but the devil's end is already set (we can read what happens in the end in the book of Revelation – lake of fire). The threat that continues is whether God's creation will submit to Him and allow His Son to save them. Spiritual, eternal death is still a threat. But one day Jesus is going to shut that whole process down and for His True People, His CHILDREN, they will be rescued once and for all and death will have no power any more.
 - **What Still Needs to be Subjected?** – Paul says that, “God has put all things in subjection under his feet,” but yet talks about it being in process. I think what Paul's point is, is that **Jesus has all the power TO GET IT DOWN and now IS DOING IT practically.** So, what are those things that still need to be done? Simply put, the bottom line on **Jesus' to-do list is: Saving all of those who are to be saved.** Everything else is the details of getting that done. Until all are saved that are supposed to be, the subjecting process of evil is not over.

- **Three in One**

- **Understanding the Trinity Better**

- **1st Corinthians 15:27b-28** – *“But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.”¹⁰*
- **Theological Trinity Clarification** – Due to the nitpicking of the Corinthian haters against him, Paul has to pause to clarify something theologically before he moves on, knowing that they will bring it up later. He fixes it now by clarifying. He said, ‘when I said that all things are under Christ, obviously **I don't mean that God the Father is UNDER Christ.**’ Paul is keeping the Trinity roles clear.
- **The Plan** – Jesus has all power over the things of this universe as He's getting His job done. The Father issued that power to Him. But that authority doesn't need to be done in the same way AFTER the end. In the end, Jesus can hand over everything back to the Father, which was the whole plan in the first place. **In the end, our Trinitarian God will be operating in the pre-creation reality of wholeness.** Jesus is still shutting down the power of the enemy (on schedule) and when he's done, we're good.

¹⁰ “Paul's point is that in raising Christ from the dead God has set in motion a chain of events that must culminate in the final destruction of death and thus of God's being once again, as in eternity past, “all in all.” NICNT

- **What's the Point?**
 - **Why Struggle So Much if There's No Resurrection?**
 - **1st Corinthians 15:29-32** – *“Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?”^{11 30} Why are we in danger every hour? ³¹ I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!^{12 32} What do I gain if, humanly speaking¹³, I fought with beasts at Ephesus?¹⁴ If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”*
 - **Baptism for the Dead** – what in the world does this mean? I would love to excuse it away as simply saying that we baptize the spiritually dead to life, and that would save us a TON of headache, but the Greek indicates that someone ELSE is baptizing for SOMEONE, and the indication is that those people have already died. It all smells like a reference to vicarious baptism, which the Christian Church has NEVER done, nor authorized. It stands against traditional Christian theology about the depravity of man as well as the meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism. It's what the Mormon church does (get baptized over and over in real life to cover those who have died before you without getting baptized. It's covering their account). We don't do that. So, what does it mean? **No one knows.** We know what it's not, but not what it is.
 - **Paul's Point** – **thankfully, Paul's point is SUPER CLEAR... WHY does the Christian Church do baptism at all** if there's no resurrection of the dead. Resurrection is literally the whole point and picture in baptism.
 - **Why is My Life So Brutal if this is All Bogus?** – Paul's desperate here. He's telling them, **I'm out there getting wrecked every day for the gospel. Why would I do that if there's no resurrection?** I would have quit a long time ago. His living testimony is evidence that Christianity is legit.
 - **Fighting Beasts in Ephesus** – Ironically he's writing this letter likely from Ephesus, so they knew exactly what he meant. Unfortunately, we only have

¹¹ See the Appendix at the end for possible meanings and research on the subject.

¹² “Daily I die.” Taken as an elaboration of v. 30, this means something like “On a daily basis I face the reality of death.” NICNT

¹³ “With this understanding of the metaphor, the much debated prepositional phrase “according to man” is also easily decided. Its meaning is not “for merely human reasons” (NIV), but exactly as in 3:3, where Paul, in contrast to their boasting of being truly “in Spirit,” accuses the Corinthians of acting “according to man,” that is, as “mere human beings” who do not have the Spirit of God. Here he means that if there is no hope in the resurrection, then his life or death struggle against the opponents of his gospel is carried on at the merely human level—he is nothing more than a “mere man” among other “mere humans.”⁵⁷ His point of course is, What sense does it make to live like *this* if we live only at the merely human level as others who have no hope for the future?” NICNT

¹⁴ “In the next sentence he refers to “fighting wild beasts in Ephesus”; in 16:9 he notes that even though a great door was open for ministry, many stood in opposition to him. Then, sometime later when writing our 2 Corinthians, shortly after leaving Ephesus, he thanks God for being delivered from a deadly peril in which he had actually despaired of his life (1:8–11), while the rest of the letter is a litany of hardships and sufferings that seem too fresh in mind to be simply general catalogues. One wonders at moments like these what a different picture of both the apostle and the early church we might have received if Paul had kept a journal of his stay in Ephesus!... The fighting “with wild beasts in Ephesus” must be understood metaphorically, not only because Paul otherwise lived to tell about it if it was literal(!),⁵¹ but because (a) such a metaphor was a common phenomenon in the moralistic literature of Hellenism, and (b) his Roman citizenship should have excluded him from what would have meant certain death if it were a literal “fight” in the arena.⁵⁴ But the metaphor is not a word about his struggle with opponents in general; rather, he specifies that it was with “wild beasts” in *Ephesus*. Since he is in Ephesus at the time of writing, and since a few paragraphs later (16:9) he refers to many who oppose him there, this is probably a reference to that struggle. The language of v. 31 would suggest that it was not simply an ideological struggle but, as often in his life, one that had exposed him to severe physical dangers as well. Beyond that, one would only be speculating.” NICNT

educated guesses. Almost all scholars believe that this is metaphorical in the sense that **it was PEOPLE he was battling**, although it was **for his very own literal life!** it was persecution, but not in any arena fighting wild beasts (he was a Roman citizen so it was outlawed).

- **If There's No Resurrection, Forget It** – Paul is so honest. If there's no resurrection, there's no hope, so **let's live it up and become worm food.**
- **Birds of a Feather**
 - **Bad Leaders Set a Bad Tone**
 - **1st Corinthians 15:33-34** – *“Do not be deceived¹⁵: “Bad company ruins good morals.”³⁴ Wake up from your drunken stupor¹⁶, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.”*
 - **Paul's lash out at bad leaders** – again Paul is taking shots at the bad leaders that set up this terrible situation in Corinth. He's telling all the rest of the Corinthians to **not listen to these bad leaders nor hang out with them.**
 - **Bad Company Ruins Good Morals** – that was an ancient wisdom writing that the people would have been familiar (from **Menander's Thais**). It means if you hang out with bad people, they are going to take you down.
 - **Wake Up!** – don't being deceived!
 - **Bad Theology is Sin** – **believing in wrong things is wrong.** It's sinful. It's our job to make sure we know what we can know and reject what's false. We don't get to just sit back and say, 'whatever.' **Our theology is an act of Worship and it's purity matters. Purity of Theology doesn't save us, but it glorifies God.** Some are ignorant theologically and that's Shameful, Paul says.

Conclusion

- **We Have Hope! For this life and for the next.**
- **If you need a dose of hope this morning will you stand up? I'm going to pray for you.**
 - **Will the prayer team come up front?**

¹⁵ “This opening exhortation, therefore, repeats the imperative of 6:9 (cf. 3:18): “Stop deceiving yourselves” (or “allowing yourselves to be misled”). Their present path is one of delusion, both in terms of their theology and its consequent behavior. In this case the delusion is spelled out in the language of an epigram from Menander's *Thais*, “Bad company corrupts good character,” which comes into the argument as something of a jolt.” NICNT

¹⁶ “Thus he exhorts them to “Sober up as you ought⁶⁵ and stop sinning.” The verb “sober up” may be a metaphor either for to awake from sleep or to be aroused from a drunken stupor⁶⁷. One cannot be sure which is mind here, although both the context (“let us eat and drink”) and the compounded form of the verb suggest that it is the latter. In any case, it is a telling metaphor for their present state of delusion, in which they both deny the resurrection and behave as if there were no future to the kingdom of God. Thus, coming to their senses, they must “stop sinning.” NICNT

Research on what “Baptism for the Dead” Means

- **The Bible Exposition Commentary says** - *“Evangelism (v. 29). What does it mean to be “baptized for the dead”? Some take this to mean “proxy baptism,” where a believer is baptized on behalf of a dead relative; but we find no such teaching in the New Testament. In the second century, there were some heretical groups that practiced “vicarious baptism,” but the church at large has never accepted the practice. To begin with, salvation is a personal matter that each must decide for himself; and, second, nobody needs to be baptized to be saved. The phrase probably means “baptized to take the place of those who have died.” In other words, if there is no resurrection, why bother to witness and win others to Christ? Why reach sinners who are then baptized and take the place of those who have died? If the Christian life is only a “dead-end street,” get off of it!”*
- **The Bible Knowledge Commentary said** - *“15:29. Up to 200 explanations have been given of this verse! Most of these interpretations are inane, prompted by a desire to conform this verse to an orthodox doctrine of baptism. It is clear from the context, however, that Paul distinguished his own practice and teaching from that described here. He merely held up the teaching of being baptized for the dead as a practice of some who denied the Resurrection. How the false teachers came to this view may never be known, but just across the Saronic Gulf, north of Corinth, lay Eleusis, the center of an ancient mystery religion lauded by Homer (Hymn to Demeter 478-79) and widely popular (cf. Cicero, himself an initiate, in De Legibus 2. 14. 36). Part of the rites of initiation into this pagan religion were washings of purification in the sea without which no one could hope to experience bliss in the life hereafter (cf. Pindar Fragment 212; Sophocles Fragment 753). A vicarious participation in the mysteries was not unknown either (cf. Orphica Fragment 245). Given the Corinthian propensity for distortion in matters of church practice (11:2-14:40), it was likely that some in Corinth (possibly influenced by the Eleusinian mystery) were propounding a false view of baptism which Paul took up and used as an argument against those who denied the Resurrection. No interpretation of this text is entirely satisfactory, but this view has as its chief strength the natural reading of the Greek verse, an asset singularly lacking in other explanations. Also it is noteworthy that Paul referred to **those** (not “we”) who are “baptized for the dead.””*
- **The New Bible Commentary said** - *“29 This is a difficult verse. Some have seen it as supporting the idea that Corinthian Christians were undergoing baptism on behalf of those already dead, presumably deceased members of their families. They have further argued that while Paul does not condone it, he is simply citing what they have done as an argument against their belief. Paul was no pragmatist. That is rather out of keeping with him as the pastor, and his incisive critical comment on their conduct throughout this letter. It would be a practice in conflict with his gospel.”*

NICNT Commentary (Gordon Fee)

The normal reading of the text is that some Corinthians are being baptized, apparently vicariously, in behalf of some people who have already died. It would be fair to add that this reading is such a plain understanding of the Greek text that no one would ever have imagined the various alternatives were it not for the difficulties involved. The problem is twofold: (1) There is no historical or biblical precedent for such baptism. The NT is otherwise completely silent about it; there is no known practice in any of the other churches nor in any orthodox Christian community in the centuries that immediately follow;¹⁷ nor are there parallels or precedents in pagan religion. This is a genuinely idiosyncratic historical phenomenon. For that reason, if in fact some were actually practicing such a baptism, we are left quite in the dark on all the essential questions: (a) *Who* was being baptized? (b) *For whom*? (c) *Why* were they doing it? (d) *What effects* did they think it had for those for whom it was being done? It is impossible to give a definitive answer to any of these.

(2) The second problem is theological and has to do with how Paul can appeal, without apparent disapproval, to a practice that stands in such contradiction to his own understanding both of justification by grace *through faith*, which always implies response on the part of the believer, and of baptism as personal response to grace received. It smacks of a “magical” view of sacramentalism of the worst kind, where a religious rite, performed for someone else, can have saving efficacy. That lies quite outside the NT view of things.

This combination of difficulties has led to a variety of alternative solutions, which at best are difficult to categorize, but which for the most part have in common the attempt to find an alternative meaning to the plain sense of one or more of the words (either “baptized,” “for,” or “the dead”).

(1) One option is to understand “baptize” metaphorically in light of Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50. Either (a) some were “being baptized into the ranks of the dead” by martyrdom, or (b) the apostles “were being destroyed by their labors on behalf of the dead (i.e., those who are lost),”²¹ a view recently revived by J. Murphy-O’Connor, but who takes v. 29a as a Corinthian gibe at Paul’s labors, to which Paul responds in the rest of the paragraph.

(2) Others take “baptized” as referring to Christian baptism but give the preposition “for” different shades of meaning; sometimes these views suggest special meanings for “the dead” as well. These run the gamut: (a) that they are being baptized “over” the graves of the dead; (b) that they are being baptized “with death before their eyes” as it were;²⁴ (c) that it means “with a view toward,” suggesting that the departed are Christians and those being baptized are new converts who are being baptized with a view toward their being reunited with their departed loved ones; (d) that it means “concerning,” or “with reference to,” having to do with the symbolic meaning of baptism, that it is in reference to death, burial, and resurrection;²⁶ (e) that the prepositional phrase goes with the verb “do,” not “baptized,” and should read, “What will the baptized do in behalf of the dead (in the future, given that they do not believe in resurrection)?”

(3) Another set of solutions attempts to find a meaning for “the dead” that will be more compatible with Pauline theology. These include: (a) that “the dead” refers to the “(soon to be) dead bodies” of the Christians themselves, and that they were being baptized for the sake of that part of them that was dying and about to become a corpse; and (b) that “the dead” refers to those among whom Christ was named, hence “What shall they do who have sworn allegiance to one who on their showing must be numbered among the dead?”²⁹

(4) Finally, some have offered alternative punctuation: either (a) “In that case, what are the baptized to do? (It is) for the dead (= merely in death), if there is no resurrection of the dead at all. Why then are they baptized for them (= and whatever is the use of that?)”; or (b) “Otherwise what shall they do who are baptized? for the dead? (i.e., are they baptized to belong to, to be numbered among the dead, who are never to rise again)? Indeed, if the dead do not rise again, why are people baptized? For them? that is, are they baptized to be numbered among the dead who are never to rise again?”³¹

Partly because of this very plethora of options, none of which is compelling as a natural reading of the text, the majority of scholars think that Paul is referring to some form of vicarious baptism. But again, there is no unanimity as to what “form” this may have taken. Some things, however, seem to be necessary prerequisites. First, as already noted (n. 15), this unusual use of the third person plural, when elsewhere Paul always turns such references into a word to the community as a whole (e.g., vv. 12–13, 35–36), suggests that it is not the action of the whole community. On the other hand, there is no reason to deny that it was happening with the full knowledge of the community and probably with their approval. Second, Paul’s apparently noncommittal attitude toward it, while not implying approval, would seem to suggest that he did not consider it to be as serious a fault as most interpreters do. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine any circumstances under which Paul would think it permissible for living Christians to be baptized for the sake of unbelievers in general. Such a view, adopted in part by the Mormons, lies totally outside the NT understanding both of salvation and of baptism. Therefore, the most likely options are (a) that it reflects some believers’ being baptized for others who either were or were on their way to becoming believers when they died (e.g., as in 11:30), but had never been baptized; or (b) that it reflects the concern of members of households for some of their own number who had died before becoming believers.

What they may have expected to gain from it is not quite clear, but one may guess that at least they believed baptism to be necessary for entering the final eschatological kingdom. In any case, and everything must be understood as tentative, this probably reflects the Corinthian attitude toward baptism in general, since 1:13–17 and 10:1–22 imply a rather strongly sacramental stance toward baptism on their part, with some apparently magical implications. Perhaps they believed that along with the gift of the Spirit baptism was their “magical” point of entrance into the new pneumatism that seems to have characterized them at every turn. If so, then perhaps some of them were being baptized for others because they saw it as a way of offering similar spirituality to the departed. But finally we must admit that we simply do not know.

In any case, whatever they were doing and for whatever reason, Paul saw it as a clear contradiction to the present stance of the community at large that “there is no resurrection of the dead.” If so, Paul argues, then this other action by some of their number is the highest expression of absurdity. From his point of view, Christ’s resurrection makes any other form of spiritual existence beyond the grave a non sequitur.¹⁷

¹⁷ Fee, G. D. (1987). [The First Epistle to the Corinthians](#) (pp. 763–767). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

NIGTC Commentary info below

“Verse 29 is a notoriously difficult crux: the most “hotly disputed” in the epistle (Conzelmann); “it is not clear precisely what this practice was” (Dale Martin); “everything must be understood as tentative” (Fee); a variety of understandings emerge “given the enigmatic nature of the practice” (Collins). By 1887 Godet had counted “about thirty explanations” for **baptized for the dead**,” while B. M. Foschini and R. Schnackenburg allude to “more than forty.” Wolff’s commentary includes seventeen subcategories with seven issue-centered general approaches.¹⁵⁷ A vast literature stretches from the second century to the present day. Mathis Rissi devoted an entire book to this one verse, categorizing a mass of views on the history of interpretation under four main groups, with variations in each group. (a) One category adds σωματων το υπερ των νεκρων, and identifies **the dead** with those who are being **baptized**. (b) A second view understands **baptism** as the suffering and death of *martyrdom*. (c) A third interprets **baptism** broadly as *washing* (where the Hebrew but not the Greek may use a common word). (d) The fourth understands this as *vicarious baptism* on behalf of people who are **dead**. Rissi rejects the “sacramentalism” often implied in this.

One problem arises from how we understand Gk. ποιεω in τι ποιησουσιν, but the key issues depend on the force of υπερ with the articular genitive plural noun των νεκρων. Other major issues concern possible connections of thought with what precedes or follows, and speculations about possible punctuation.

The semantic range of ποιεω is vast, as the sheer column-inches in BAGD and Grimm-Thayer bear witness, although proportionately much less space is devoted to the word in Liddell-Scott-Jones or Lampe’s *Patristic Greek Lexicon*. The relevant possibilities for exploration in this verse may be summarized as (a) *achieving, bringing about*; (b) intransitive *doing* as an activity; (c) *fashioning*, perhaps in an indulgent, self-generating way; and (d) *doing* with a future to indicate the subjective dimension also implicit in (c), i.e., *doing in terms of what one thinks one is doing*. (i) NJB’s *What are people up to who ... ?* is very tempting and could be right. We included it as our translation in an earlier draft, but it misses the *subjective* dimension which several writers perceive (probably rightly) here. Worse in this respect is (ii), *What do they achieve ... ?* (cf. Grotius, “*quid efficient?*”). P. Bachmann, A. Schlatter, and Barrett (in part) argue for this view, but Meyer comments that a notion of “achievement” by baptism would be “a thought foreign to the apostle. He wished to point out the subjective absurdity of the procedure.” (iii) Weiss understands τι ποιησουσιν as “indeed of course a mode of logical future,” but renders it, “What should they resort to.... What will they do in the future?” This accords with Barrett’s second point that the future may convey the force of, *What will they do next?* (i.e., when it is discovered that there is no resurrection). Barrett agrees that the net force is subjective or self-involving: “Will not these people look fools when ... ?” (iv) NRSV, NIV, *what will they do ... ?* (with Wolff and Collins) is similar, but loses both the logical and subjective force. (v) Curiously REB underlines the subjective aspect, but transfers this to the readers rather than those to whom the text refers: *What do you suppose they are doing?* (vi) Moffatt can find more lexicographical support than we might imagine for *What is the meaning of people getting baptized ... ?* and is a possible way forward. (vii) All in all, **What do those people think they are doing who ... ?** does justice to (a) the use of the future as a *logical* present; (b) the *subjective* or self-involving aspect; (c) an open-ended appeal to them to reflect on their *self-consistency* of thought and action; and (d) the *wide semantic range* of the word.

MULTIPLE INTERPRETATIONS OF “BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD” AND OUR CONCLUSION

We must now enumerate the main interpretations of the notorious phrase υπερ των νεκρων, *translated on behalf of the dead* in NRSV, REB, NJB, and Barrett, **or for the dead** (NIV, AV/KJV), **or for the sake of the dead**, our translation, following Findley, Raeder, Howard, Collins, and Schnackenburg. (If *for* is understood in its “final” sense, this is also acceptable.) It would detain us unduly to enumerate the many which scarcely deserve thought, but we shall *cite (A) ten which are on the whole unconvincing, together with (B) a further three which are either widespread (11, 12) or (in the last case) highly probable (13).*

(A)(1) Theodore Beza (d. 1605), Heinrich Bullinger (d. 1575), and J. Cocceius (d. 1669), followed in modern times by J. M. Ford, understand οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι as “*qui ablutione utuntur*,” i.e., *washing*. Beza forced the Greek syntax to mean who wash their dead [for burial]”; Cocceius, “who wash themselves from ceremonial defilement by touching a dead body.” Neither the syntax nor the context nor (here) lexicography can support this.

(A)(2) John Lightfoot (d. 1664) understood των νεκρων to refer to the dying martyrs, and *interprets* baptism metaphorically to *refer to the baptism of suffering and martyrdom*. This would fit Paul’s point about resurrection and also 15:30, but strains των νεκρων unduly. Wolff observes that no such role is ascribed to martyrs at such an early time.

(A)(3) Thomas Aquinas and Nicholas de Lyra (d. 1349) identify υπερ των νεκρων *with mortal sins*, for the sake of which people are baptized, but this is anachronistic and violates exegetical criteria.

(A)(4) Luther, followed in the modern period by H. Ewald and in part by F. Grosheide, understand υπερ in its local *sense* of above, and *interpret* the dead as *representing the tombs or the graves of the dead*. Grosheide *observes*, “The dead in our context always represents the group of the dead as a whole, not individual dead persons.” He considers it possible, but not

certain, that “some at Corinth had themselves baptized above the graves, namely of relatives who had died in Christ.” Luther first considers “vicarious” baptism and rejects it. The background is “escorting the dead to their graves with honor” as the joint context with baptism as a sign of the reality of the hope of resurrection. However, this local use of ὑπέρ is less common in Koine than in classical Greek and apparently foreign to the NT, and there is no evidence of any special attention to tombs of Christians in c. AD 54–55.

(A)(5) Bengel, Flacius, and Calvin follow Epiphanius in regarding the context as probably *that of the deathbed*. Bengel comments on the variety of theories, and concludes: “*Nec martyria, nec baptismi super sepulcris, etc ... sed eo tempore quum mortem ante oculos positam habent ... vel decrepitam aetatem ... vel per martyrium.*” Calvin concedes that he changed his mind about the meaning. “I used to think that Paul was pointing out the all-embracing end of baptism here, for the benefit of baptism is not confined to our life here.” But closer study, Calvin argues, suggests that Paul has in mind those “who have given up hope of life,” perhaps especially catechumens who had fallen ill and were “clearly in imminent danger of death.” Calvin’s allusion to “the Fathers” who report the infiltration of superstition well fits the allusion to this verse in Epiphanius. Epiphanius explains it as *the* clinici, catechumens on their deathbed. P. Bachmann supports this view, but Meyer insists that this forces the Greek of v. 29.

(A)(6) H. Olshausen (see also in Preisker, below) offers at first sight what hardly seems to be a serious view, but Edwards and others regard it as linguistically and exegetically possible. He interprets the Greek “who are baptized to fill the place of the dead”: a definite number (πληρωμα) need to be baptized. If Edwards is correct about the force of ὑπέρ, the one conceivable merit here is continuity with the eschatological drama of vv. 22–28. Yet this idea seems foreign to Paul, and very few accept it in the end.

(A)(7) John Edwards (1692) interprets this verse as referring to people who have themselves baptized as converts because they have witnessed the radiant confidence and courage of the martyrs. Paul witnessed the martyrdom of Stephen in this way. Yet many argue that the force of ὑπέρ becomes strained, and it is not clear why Paul should use οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι rather than οἱ πιστεύοντες.

(A)(8) Chrysostom, Theophylact, Photius, and Erasmus understand τῶν νεκρῶν as an ellipsis reflecting the baptismal creed in faith: τοῦ νεκροῦ σώματος ἀνάστασιν πιστεύων, i.e., believes and expects the resurrection of the dead. The dead refers to “soon to be” dead bodies. Chrysostom utterly rejects the view of “baptizing in place of the departed” as a Marcionite heresy fit for “people out of their mind ... and exceedingly simple.” Such would be an easy solution, if it did not import into the Greek an additional phrase which is absent: this seems hardly an “elliptic” use of τῶν νεκρῶν without further explanation. Nevertheless, it carried favor in the patristic era.

(A)(9) W. E. Vine repunctuates the verse to give it a different meaning, following a proposal by Sir Robert Anderson (1905) to read: *Otherwise, what shall they do who are baptized? It is for dead persons if the dead do not rise.* A full stop or period separates ὑπέρ τῶν νεκρῶν from οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι, and more especially from ποιήσουσιν. This is suggestive but strains the syntax. As Fee observes, “none [of these] is compelling.”¹⁸²

(A)(10) J. Murphy-O’Connor refers to the early tradition of understanding baptism as sharing in Jesus’ “cup” of suffering and death (Mark 10:39; cf. Luke 12:50; Rom 6:3). In line with the possible jibe against Paul as a “dead foetus” (or however we translate ἐκτρώματι in 15:8), the “spiritual elite” at Corinth use derogatory slogans about Paul which here he seeks to turn around against them to support his argument about resurrection. Baptized for the dead originated as an anti-Pauline slogan concerning Paul’s suffering and support for an inferior class of believer who is dead to true “wisdom.” Ironically Paul asks whether such work would continue if there were no resurrection. The strongest arguments for this are (a) the close link with v. 30; (b) the close connection between baptism and death (cf. Mark 10:39 and the work of Cullmann and others on such passages); and (c) the Corinthian use of slogans, e.g., clearly 6:12; 10:23, and several others; and (d) Paul’s delight in turning round the slogans against them. Against Murphy-O’Connor’s view is its speculative nature and lack of clear linguistic support. Although recently J. L. White has argued that the phrase may allude to the apostles, Wolff, on the other side, draws attention to the awkward syntax of καὶ ἡμεῖς in v. 30 if Paul is an implicit referent behind the allusion of v. 29. The idea deserves serious thought, but fails to carry conviction. White correctly points out that the immediate context refers to dangers which Paul faces (vv. 30–31), but it is more precarious to suppose that he defines “apostle” as one of “the dead” in the present verse.

(B)(11) A large number of writers insist that v. 29 concerns vicarious baptism. This is the first of the three views (under B) which deserve more prominence either because, as with (11) and (12), they are widespread and influential, or because, with (13), they are the most probable and relatively convincing. Conzelmann declares, “The wording is in favor of the ‘normal’ exposition in terms of ‘vicarious baptism’: in Corinth living people have themselves vicariously baptized for dead people.” Collins offers a similar view. This shows the “sacramentalism” prevailing in Corinth, and “Paul does not criticize the custom but makes use of it for his argument.”¹⁸⁷

(B)(11)(a) Schmithals is so confident about this view, especially in the light of alleged gnostic influence and that of the hellenistic mystery religion, that he asserts: “It is absurd to dispute this, as Bachmann and Schlatter, for instance, have attempted to do in a more than dubious fashion.” In the light of such an immoderate statement, it is scarcely surprising that Conzelmann describes this verse as “hotly disputed.” This “baptism by proxy,” Schmithals observes, “was common among Gnostics” (and apparently may occur in some form in Mormon circles on occasion today). Indeed, in Gnosticism, Schmithals claims, baptism for the dead has greater significance than for the living.¹⁹⁰ “The effect of the baptism for the dead was magical

in nature,” and such gnostic texts as *Pistis Sophia*, Schmithals concludes, offer parallels with 15:29. Weiss, Lietzmann, and Wendland argue for vicarious baptism, citing allusions in Tertullian, Chrysostom, and Epiphanius to the practice among Marcionites and other sects.

(B)(11)(b) Some have attempted to argue for vicarious or “proxy” baptism in a sense which depends less on a history-of-religions context than that urged by Schmithals. Wedderburn sees it as baptism on behalf of unbaptized Christians. However, *the opus operatum* “sacramentalism” postulated by Hans von Soden has lived on until the last few years, when the tide has turned. Horsley retains the view that some “were baptized vicariously on behalf of deceased friends and relatives.”¹⁹⁵ However, H. Preisker finds a different apocalyptic background in, e.g., 4 Ezra 4:35; 1 Enoch 47:4; Rev 7:2–4 which leads him to declare, “Vicarious baptism is thus not sacramental, but an eschatological use.” Preisker argues that the connection lies with the apocalyptic verses 24–28, and therefore presupposes a background of the resurrection of the righteous. Those standing “near” to them could benefit from their deeds by proxy. This view is rightly criticized by Schnackenburg as “unacceptable.” Parry more generally concludes: “The plain and necessary sense of the words implies the existence of a practice of vicarious baptism at Corinth, presumably on behalf of believers who died before they were baptized.”¹⁹⁸

(B)(11)(c) Some softening of what constitutes a version of this view comes from Allo and from Hays in different ways. Allo cites the very case of catechumens who, in their own baptism, wish to be identified with the dead of their family in near or actual Christian faith, i.e., without an “official” baptism but with “a baptism of desire.” In this one specific instance, it might be understandable if for pastoral reasons Paul refrains from questioning what has been done. This makes further possible sense if, with Hays, we call to mind the “less individualistic” view of Paul than that of modern Protestant thought: “the community can act meaningfully on behalf of those who are not able to act on their own behalf.” This specific principle is in part instantiated in Anglican and Protestant traditions which practice infant baptism, and Hays also notes that Paul does not “commend” vicarious baptism: he merely points out that to practise it while doubting the resurrection would be self-contradictory. Many remain unconvinced by this view, both in the patristic era and in recent years, as well as among the Reformers. Murphy-O’Connor declares: “The difficulty ... is that Paul’s understanding of the way the sacraments work would never have permitted him to condone such superstition in any of his churches.... The dead cannot make the act of faith that saves (Rom 10:9).” Further, although many argue that Paul does not necessarily approve of this practice, the transition to v. 30 through καὶ ἡμεῖς seems to suggest a continuity of practice which has Paul’s approval, and this is scarcely conceivable, even if we grant that the “special case” proposed by Allo might well merit a pastoral blind eye. *The ferocity with which Tertullian and especially Chrysostom view such a practice and characterize it as bizarre among heretics should not too easily be forgotten or swept aside.* As Kistemaker observes, if those for whom baptism is received by proxy are dead Christian believers, how can this salvation be doubted if they are indeed believers, whether or not they have been formally baptized? Paul nowhere stipulates that baptism is a necessary condition of salvation; only that it is a normal and appropriate visible mark of union with Christ and of sharing in Christ’s death and resurrection through grace in the wider experience of conversion-initiation. Perhaps few writings have done more to engage the actual rite of baptism from absolute identification with the wider complex of conversion-initiation than James Dunn’s work on baptism and on “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” He observes, “It is clear from Rom 6:4 that the rite of baptism usually played a part in helping bring about the reality depicted by the metaphor of being baptized.... ‘Baptized in Spirit’ is even more clearly an initiatory metaphor ... baptized in Spirit into Christ.... Paul’s correction of elitist spiritualities in Corinth ... almost reads like a correction of some of the similar misconceptions in modern Pentecostalism....” Without doubt, 1 Cor 15:29 alludes to the practice, not the metaphor, of baptism; but the wooden literalism that ascribes to Paul indifference to a practice of proxy baptism as “achieving” something for dead believers (let alone for dead unbelievers) sidesteps recent research on Paul’s broadly nuanced understanding of baptism (see also on 1:14–17, above, which is relevant here).

Above all, it is those who hold a high view of the rite of baptism who find baptism for the dead most difficult: would not Paul deeply care if this important rite, with all its self-involving role as an effective sign of grace, is reduced to a mere instrumental mechanism? This emerges in the detailed study by M. Rissi to which we have referred.²⁰⁶ If baptism entails a serious appropriation of the grace of identification with Christ in his death and resurrection, how can the context be other than that of believers, or (in a later second-generation context) an initiating plea for grace on the presupposition of nurture within a Christian home and family? The state of the dead hardly seems to allow for a serious understanding of what baptism represents and entails. E. Stauffer’s countersuggestion that the rite would represent an “intercessory” baptism for the dead on the analogy of “offering (or atonement) for the dead” by Judas Maccabaeus (2 Macc 12:45; cf. vv. 39–44) is too slender and tenuous to bear the weight of such an extension of the theology of baptism. Downey’s counterargument about baptismal protection from “principalities and powers” in the afterlife also goes beyond Paul’s own theology of salvation and its sacraments.²⁰⁸

(B)(12) A variant of the above (which might have been categorized as [11](d)) is advocated most clearly and sharply by H. Alford (1881), although rather differently expressed by Heinrici and in part by Rissi. Alford declares, “The only legitimate reference is to a practice ... not mentioned here with any approval by the Apostle ... in use by some of the survivors allowing themselves to be baptized on behalf of (believing?) Friends who had died without baptism.... But ... Paul does not mention it without a slur on it” (his italics). Needless to say, Alford refers to references in Tertullian, Chrysostom, and Epiphanius in which the Fathers repudiate the practice as non-Christian or heretical. Since the practice (if it existed) “dwindled away,” it may be inferred that this is something “with which he [Paul] could have no real sympathy.”²¹¹ This is confirmed by the nuance of τὴν τοῦ ἰουδαίου; (see

above): “There is in these words a tacit reprehension of the practice about to be mentioned, which it is hardly possible to miss.” Heinrici is far less emphatic than Alford about the nature of Paul’s reserve, but it features in his argument.²¹³ Senft cites this approach as originating with Ambrosiaster. However, once again, Rissi looks at Paul’s theology of baptism and the work of Christ as a whole, and like Murphy-O’Connor cannot concede that Paul would be indifferent to some instrumentalist view of its nature in isolation from a more adequate context. The difficulties which beset (B)(11) also apply, even if less forcefully, to this proposal, together with an apparently more abrupt switch to the positive in v. 30.

(B)(13) In 1955 Maria Raeder (following G. G. Findlay) explicated more clearly than before a view which had been hinted at in earlier theories, namely **that baptism for the sake of (ὑπέρ) the dead refers to the decision of a person or persons to ask for, and to receive, baptism as a result of the desire to be united with their believing relatives who have died. This presupposes that they would share the radiant confidence that they would meet again in and through Christ at the resurrection of the dead.** As a pupil of J. Jeremias, Maria Raeder was well aware of linguistic issues and argues convincingly that this coheres well with uses of the preposition ὑπέρ, in the “final” sense of for, i.e., for the sake of. Indeed, it is regularly so used in the context of the work of Christ and the earliest kerygma, and coheres well with Robertson and Plummer’s proposed baptized out of consideration for the dead. If we consider such a scenario as that of a godly parent who longs for a son or daughter to come to faith, the nuance of ὑπέρ as for the sake of (in pragmatic terms) makes sense.

Our Conclusion

J. K. Howard fully supports and develops this view against those which favor vicarious baptism. **He writes that baptism for (for the sake of) the dead is “not in order to remedy some deficiency on the part of the dead, but in order to be reunited with them at the resurrection.”** Schackenburg agrees that “the argument does not step outside the frame of primitive Christian views and above all fits excellently into the resurrection chapter.” The linguistic **force of ὑπέρ**, for the sake of, is preserved, together with a convincing nonmetaphorical meaning for **both τῶν νεκρῶν (the Christian dead) and the middle-voice force of οἱ βαπτιζόμενα, those who have themselves baptized.** We may return to G. G. Findlay’s succinct and careful comments. After exposing the fallacy of some competing views, he observes, “Paul is referring rather to a much commoner, indeed a normal experience, that the death of Christians leads to the conversion of survivors, who in the first instance ‘for the sake of the dead’ (their beloved dead) and in the hope of re-union, *turn* to Christ — e.g., when a dying mother wins her son by the appeal ‘Meet me in heaven!’ Such appeals, and their frequent salutary effect, give strong and touching evidence of faith in the resurrection” (Findlay’s italics).

The supposed objection that such conversion would depend on mixed motives in the first place merely finds replication over the centuries in many pastoral situations, and, second, should not obscure the focus of the confident witness to Christ and to the resurrection which such a plea transparently presupposed. From a dying loved one, this would carry enormous weight. There is no room for pretense or self-interest on a deathbed: the sincerity and transparency of faith and witness become overwhelming. Of two recent articles, the work of R. E. DeMaris on archaeological evidence concerning the importance **of the world of the dead in mid-first-century Corinth** carries weight, but may in effect count equally in favor of the “vicarious baptism” view or this final argument. For the more significant the fate of the dead, the more important and effective would be the plea of the deathbed Christian, with a view to reunion in the afterlife. On the other hand: most of the arguments against view (11) still apply. J. D. Reaume’s recent article, however, confirms the direction of our *own arguments. We see no reason to reject this view (B)(13) as the least problematic and most convincing of all.*”