

1 Corinthians 15:29

(29) 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?

King James Version

Some interpret these two questions to mean that Paul approved of the practice of [baptism](#) for the dead, using the fact of the [resurrection from the dead](#) to reason, "What good is baptizing for the dead if there is no such thing as a resurrection?"

The Bible, however, asserts in many passages that, before a person can be baptized, he must first [repent](#) ([Acts 2:38](#)) and believe ([Mark 16:16](#); [Acts 16:31](#), 33), but the dead, of course, cannot repent or believe because "the dead know nothing" ([Ecclesiastes 9:5](#)). Baptism is for the living; it is a ritual by which a living person acknowledge his sins, figuratively dies with Christ in a watery grave, and rises out of it to live a new, righteous life through [Jesus Christ](#) and the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit ([Romans 6:4](#); [8:9](#); [Galatians 2:20](#)). Besides, there is no scriptural support for reconciling with [God](#) by proxy!

There is also a translation problem with [I Corinthians 15:29](#). Paul is not talking about being baptized "on behalf of" or "for" the dead. The Greek word translated "for" is *hyper* (often transliterated *hyper*), and it has several meanings: "above," "over," "instead of," "for the realization of," or "for the [hope](#) of," depending upon the context. Here, it is best translated as "for the hope of": "Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized *for the hope* of the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they then baptized *for the hope* of the dead?"

What is the hope of the dead? The resurrection, and baptism illustrates this when a person rises out of the water, just as the saints will rise from the grave in the resurrection. Paul is thus saying, "What good is it to be baptized if we do not rise in a resurrection from the dead? Why then should one be baptized for a hope that would never be realized?" The apostle affirms in verses 17-22 that, because Christ died and rose again, we indeed have this hope to look forward to.

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:
[Apologizing for the Dead](#)

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