



"I will not waste my life in friction when it could be turned into momentum."

—Francis Willard

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Apologizing for the Dead

On a regular basis, the church receives a question from a subscriber or a visitor to one of its websites about the Mormon practice of [baptism](#) for the dead. The Latter-Day Saints base their doctrine on [I Corinthians 15:29](#), in which the apostle Paul seems to mention that it was being practiced in his day: "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?" The Mormons interpret these two questions to mean that Paul approved of the practice, 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.

Now, however, the modern culture of victimization has put its own twist on this false doctrine. Today, minority groups are demanding apologies for historical wrongs perpetrated on their ancestors. For instance, a small but vocal segment of the American black population is demanding not only that an apology be given for their forebears' bondage, but also that reparations be paid to them for their ancestors' work, pain, and suffering. Sons and daughters of Americans of Japanese descent have asked for—and received—similar words and payments for their parents' internment during WWII. Not to be left out, descendants of American Indians desire an admission of national guilt and restitution as well.

This concept has reached out to embroil industry as well:

A Chicago ordinance required Wachovia [a North Carolina-based financial holding company] to look through its history for any relationship to slavery. Because the bank was established in 1781, an investigation showed that it had connections to hundreds of now defunct banks, including two that were involved with the slave trade before the Civil War.

Ken Thompson, Wachovia chairman and chief executive officer, expressed his regret in a press release, stating that he was "deeply saddened" by the discovery and apologized "especially to African-Americans and people of African descent." . . .

Wachovia is not the first bank to apologize for connections to slavery. J.P. Morgan Chase & Co. admitted to past slavery connections earlier this year. The bank offered to create a \$5 million scholarship program for African-American youth, but reparation activists dismissed the offer as insignificant.

WCNC.com, the website of a Charlotte, N.C., television station, has reported that black leaders in that region plan to take steps toward seeking financial damages for the slave trade of the 18th and 19th centuries. (Alexa Moutevelis, "Wachovia Apology Renews Reparations Debate," CNSNews.com, June 03, 2005)

Most people realize that the reparations movement is nothing more than an organized shakedown of the government and wealthy corporations. *Cherchez l'argent*, as the French say: "Follow the money." If the movement were really about principle, a statement of regret would be enough.

Is this any different in principle from baptism for the dead? America is 140 years removed from slavery, and obviously, none of the original players in that drama is still alive. Not one slave owner can apologize for his slaving ways, and not one former slave is still living to receive it. While the dim repercussions of slavery are still felt—predominantly in the form of racism, a different subject altogether—slavery itself and any apologies or reparations are literally a dead issue! As God puts it, "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself" ([Ezekiel 18:20](#)). Guilt and recompense are not legally transferable to subsequent generations.

Besides, America paid the price of slavery. Over half a million men gave their lives in a war that settled the question of involuntary servitude in the United States, not to mention the destruction to America's economy and

infrastructure due to that war, especially in the South, where the institution of slavery flourished for centuries. In the meantime, the descendants of slaves have won legal equality with whites and the same access to the American dream as any other citizen.

Perhaps the saddest part of this fiasco is realizing how many people are wasting their time, resources, and energy on fighting the squabbles of the past, when they could be working to make their and their children's futures brighter.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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[Values and Conversion](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Our natural carnal human nature is committed to values that are destroying us spiritually. These are values derived from family, religious, and cultural traditions—old wine that cannot go into new wineskins. Conversion involves incorporating new and godly values, which clash violently with what we already are. God's Word sets the value system for those who believe in Him, setting them apart from other destructive value systems, freeing them from death. Repentance involves incorporating God's values, alien to our human nature—ones that will unify us with God and with others who accept His value system.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[America's Mercenary Culture](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Mercenaries are soldiers who fight for money. Sociologists are concerned

that the mercenary attitude pervades American culture from Washington to Peoria. Does the Bible have anything to say about this "each man for himself" way of life?

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