

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Baptism for the Dead

By Joe R. Price

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) believe the New Testament church practiced baptism for (on behalf of, in the place of) the dead. Their attempted justification of this hinges, in part, on a misunderstanding of 1 Corinthians 15:29. However, their defense of baptism for dead people goes farther than that. They teach after death one still possesses the ability to choose right and wrong. To them, baptism for a dead person provides that person with the opportunity to choose whether they will accept its benefits and “progress to the celestial kingdom” (Mormon terminology for eternal life). This contradicts Hebrews 9:27 and Luke 16:25-26.

We should allow plain passages of Scripture help explain the more difficult ones. Admittedly, 1 Corinthians 15:29 presents challenges of interpretation, but its meaning is within our reach. While defending the truth of resurrection from the dead, the apostle Paul offered a motive for baptism that is nullified if there is no resurrection from the dead. That motive is the death of saints who willingly give their lives for their faith. Stephen comes to mind, as do other Christians who died at the hands of their persecutors (Acts 7:57-60; 26:10; Rev. 2:13). Their deaths helped motivate others to be baptized into Christ. Paul’s point is this: *“If the dead are not raised, why then are they baptized for them?”* If there is no resurrection, to be baptized only to experience martyrdom without a future hope of life is futile and foolish (1 Cor. 15:17-19).

The word translated *“for”* in 1 Corinthians 15:29 is the preposition *hyper*, and can mean “on account of” (examples are found in Acts 15:26; Rom. 1:5). Notice how Paul makes ascending applications in his remarks: *“they”* (15:29), *“we”* (15:30), and *“I”* (15:31-32). His summary is, *“if the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”* (15:32). To conclude *“baptism for the dead”* in verse 29 can only be proxy baptism fails to consider the circumstance of suffering for Christ and the threat death that gives context and explanation to Paul’s statement.

There is another reason to conclude Paul is not advocating the practice of baptism in place of dead people.

The New Testament teaches there is *“one baptism”* (Eph. 4:5). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has added another baptism to the great commission baptism commanded by Jesus (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16). When we compare LDS baptism for the dead with the great commission baptism, it becomes clear LDS baptism for the dead is a human addition to the word of God.

Please note these differences between the baptism preached by Christ’s first-century apostles and the additional one preached by the 21st-century LDS apostles:

Great commission baptism is for the living; it is personal and for the remission of sins. It is Biblical and true (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21).

LDS baptism for the dead is for the dead; it is in place of someone else and allegedly provides the dead with a choice to accept or reject its benefits. This is non-biblical and false. If true, there are two baptisms (one for the living and one for the dead), not one (Eph. 4:5). This false LDS doctrine and practice changes the apostolic gospel of the first century, which Galatians 1:6-9 warns we are accursed if we do.

The living have opportunities to obey Christ, be saved, praise, and serve God. But the dead await God’s judgment for the deeds done in the flesh (Isa. 38:18-19; Heb. 9:27; Luke 16:19-31; Heb. 3:7-11). *“For we must all*

appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

Use the time you have to believe and obey the gospel of Christ. Now is the day of salvation, not after you die (2 Cor. 6:2; Eph. 5:16; James 4:15-17). ■

Noteworthy News

(Current events in the light of Scripture)

By Joe R. Price

The Biltmore Church, affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, is a multisite megachurch in North Carolina. It recently reported at least 282 people were baptized in a single day (“282 People Baptized at N.C. Megachurch in a One Day,” Milton Quintanilla, (christianheadlines.com).

Sadly, these people were taught they were saved before being baptized. According to the Scriptures, these 282 souls are still lost (unlike the 3,000 baptized in one day in Jerusalem, Acts 2:37-41).

They are believers in Jesus Christ, no doubt. But faith only does not save the lost (James 2:14-26). We have no reason to doubt the sincerity of these 282 souls. We suspect they genuinely expressed loyalty to the Savior they believed had already forgiven their sins. Yet, Baptists reject baptism for salvation. *“Baptists believe that the Bible teaches that baptism is important but not necessary for salvation”* (“Baptists: Believer’s Baptism,” baptistdistinctives.org/).

In striking contrast to Baptist doctrine, the Bible says, *“There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”* (1 Pet. 3:21). Water baptism puts the sinner into Christ and into contact with Christ’s death (His shed blood). In baptism, the sinner dies to sin and is united with Christ to walk in the newness of life (Rom. 6:2-5).

The Biltmore Church’s website quotes the Baptist Faith and Message 2000: *“Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”* The Bible never calls baptism “Christian” because Christians are not baptized; Sinners are. Yes, believers are baptized, but without baptism (along with repentance and confession of faith), believers remain lost (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:37-38; 22:16; Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:9-10).

Instead of the false hope given to many souls, we pray all who reject the necessity of water baptism will believe and obey Christ’s command to repent and be baptized *“for the remission of sins”* (Acts 2:38). ■

You Can – But You Can’t

By Grover Stevens

You can ignore God’s warnings; you can refuse his blessings; you can reject all his wondrous love, but you can’t go to heaven doing so.

You can believe any doctrine you choose; you can belong to the church of your choice; you can worship God as you please, but you can’t please God doing so (2 Jno. 9; Matt. 15:9,13; Rom. 10:1).

It seems that Satan has done a remarkable job of convincing the people that their religion is a matter of their choice, not God’s; that it is a matter of their being pleased. ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Tommy Glendol McClure, Editor and Evangelist - 925-759-4357

Web Site: www.lodicachurchofchrist.com - Email: lodicachurchofchrist@gmail.com - Phone: 209-365-9250