

"BAPTISM - FOR THE DEAD...?"

By Dr. Hoyt W. Allen, Jr.

I Corinthians 15:29 NIV "Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all why are people baptized for them?"

Someone once said that there are a multitude of different interpretations of this passage. There are some who have concluded that a living person can be baptized for a dead person who was never baptized while living. In today's world probably the most noted group to be practicing this erroneous doctrine is the Mormon Church (Church Of Jesus Christ Of Latter Day Saints). Every year thousands of Mormons are baptized for departed individuals, some of which were not even knowledgeable of Mormonism.

Chrysostom (345?-407 A.D.) states that it prevailed among the Marcionites, a second century irreligious sect, who practiced this erroneous doctrine. When a candidate died before being able to be baptized, the history book says (Baker Encyclopedia, Of the Bible, Vol. 1, pg. 260) they concealed a living person under the couch where the dead person lay. Then when they asked the dead person if he wanted to be baptized, the living person under the couch would reply "yes" and then would be baptized for the dead person.

It is possible that the Corinthians were practicing a proxy baptism. But, of course, the only ones Scripturally eligible for baptism are living, believing, repentant persons (Acts 16:31; 17:30; 2:38; 8:37; 14:22). Paul was responding to some who denied that there was a resurrection (see 15:12). If he were referring to a proxy baptism being practiced there in Corinth, then his argument was "why are you baptizing people on behalf of those who have already died (to the desire to sin) if you don't believe they will someday be resurrected?" It is possible that he was using a practice of theirs, which gave credit to some magical powers to baptism, to point out its inconsistency with a "no resurrection" position, that some were holding to.

Paul is stating that a person must die to sin (the desire to sin) before being baptized (See Colossians 2:12-13; Romans 6:2-8, 11). By no stretch of one's imagination can one conclude that baptizing a living person for a dead person fits into the context of the new testament. The **IMPORTANT QUESTION** is: Have we been Scripturally baptized?