Mormon Doctrine

“Verily, verily, I [Christ] say unto you [Joseph Smith], they who believe not on your words, and are not baptized in water in my name, for the remission of their sins, that they may receive the Holy Ghost, shall be damned…”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Salvation for the dead is the system where those who would have accepted the gospel in this life had they been permitted to hear it, will have the chance to accept it in the spirit world, and will then be entitled to all the blessings which passed them by in mortality. [[2]](#footnote-2)

…the Lord has ordained baptism for the dead as the means where by all his worthy children of all ages can become heirs of salvation in his kingdom …during the frequent periods of apostate darkness when the gospel light does not shine, and also in those geographical areas where legal administrators are not found, hosts of people live and die without ever entering in the gate of baptism so as to be on the path leading to eternal life. For them a just God has ordained baptism for the dead…[[3]](#footnote-3)

Those saints, who neglect it [baptism for the dead] in behalf of their deceased relatives, do it at the peril of their own salvation.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Biblical Teaching

The added necessity of believing Joseph Smiths words for salvation constitutes “another gospel”. **8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! [[5]](#footnote-5)**

Once a person dies there is no return, no second chances as the writer to the Hebrews “**27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment…”** [[6]](#footnote-6)

Christians are to be baptizing (infants to adults) to make disciples, but the neglecting of this command (e.g. the thief on the cross-Luke 23:43) short of the rejection of Christ’s command, does not condemn. (Mark 16:16)

**29 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? [[7]](#footnote-7) “**There is a special difficulty in understanding this verse since we do not know the background of the words “baptized for the dead.”[[8]](#footnote-8) There are many different attempts to understand this passage but all are spurious at best and ultimately it is a guess as to the meaning. The Concordia Self Study bible says, “The present tense suggests that at Corinth people were currently being baptized for the dead. But because Paul does not give any more information about the practice, many attempts have been made to interpret the concept.”

“Three of these are: 1. Living believers were being baptized for believers who died before they were baptized, so that they too, in a sense, would not miss out on baptism. 2. Christians were being baptized in anticipation of the resurrection of the dead. 3. New converts were being baptized to fill the ranks of Christians who had died.”

“At any rate, Paul mentions this custom almost in passing, using it in his arguments substantiating the resurrection of the dead, but without necessarily approving the practice. Possibly Paul is citing an improper practice, similar to that of modern Mormons, as an example of people who believe in the resurrection. Probably the passage will always remain obscure.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

St. Paul clearly makes the point in I Corinthians that resurrection of the body is a useless teaching unless Christ did not factually, physically and historically come back to life and walk out of the tomb on His own power. But because Christ did factually, physically and historically rise from the dead, we who are saved, that is who trust in Christ shall rise from the dead also.

A similar list of ideas from Mark Van Bebber is as follows and might explain the phrase is as follows:

* Epiphanius, an ancient church father, understood this to refer to the practice of instructing people who were on their death bed about Christ. However, this understanding doesn't seem to fit the context or language of the verse.
* Some have argued that this verse refers to a superstitious baptism for believers who were “outside” the church. However, Paul's understanding of “the church” included all believers; unlike the view of Catholic Christians many centuries later.
* Another view that was held during the middle ages referred to the practice of believers lying under the beds of those unbelievers who had recently died. A priest would ask the dead person if he desired to be baptized and forgiven of sins. The living believer would answer in the affirmative from under the bed and the dead person would be baptized. Although this practice is reported to have existed in the middle ages, there is no evidence that it occurred during the time of the Apostles or that this was the practice to which Paul referred.
* Still others have suggested that there may have been a cult that existed in [Corinth](http://christiananswers.net/dictionary/corinth.html) which baptized its members on behalf of the dead, much like modern Mormonism. Commentators have noted that if this is the situation, that we must remember that Paul does not confirm or deny this practice; it is simply used as an illustration of the importance of the resurrection. The weakness of this view is that history does not record any cults that included the baptism for the dead during this time period in Corinth.
* The final option, which seems to be the most reasonable, is that the baptism for the dead refers to those who are willing to be identified with Christianity and who suffer the fate of persecution just as those who have lived as examples before them. These people are even willing to die for Christ because they are convinced that the resurrection of the dead is a reality. Thus baptism for those who are about to die a martyrs death.

1. (Doctrine and Covenants 84:74) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. (Mormon Doctrine, p. 673; Doctrines of Salvation, vol. 2, pages 100-196) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. (Doctrines and Covenants 124: 28-36; 127; 128) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 193) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (1984). (Ga 1:8–9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (1984). (Heb 9:27). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (1984). (1 Co 15:29). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Mare, W. H. (1976). 1 Corinthians. In F. E. Gaebelein (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians* (Vol. 10, p. 287). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Hoeber, R. G. (1997). *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (electronic ed., 1 Co 15:29). St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)