

THESIS ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

Adventist University of Africa

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Title: “BAPTIZED FOR THE DEAD” IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15:29:
A CONTEXTUAL EVALUATION

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After carefully studying the solo passage on baptism for the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29, the researcher sought to know whether the author was authenticating the position as held by some religious group who practice baptism for the dead or if it was a referential statement to a certain heretical practice that was condemned. Baptism, of course, is considered as a rite of admission into the Christian Church. Christ has mandated the Church to accomplish this sacred task of baptizing people and as well teaching them the deeper truth (Matt 28:19, 20). However, the beneficiaries of this rite were expected to be living people who give their lives for the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the statement made by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:29 about the baptism for the death seems to distort the traditional requirement of baptism. This statement by the Apostle Paul was reactive. He was responding to the situation of not believing in the

resurrection of the dead as held by some Corinthians. Hence the rhetorical questions, “What will they do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?” (1 Cor 15:29). Thus, the major thrust of Paul’s discourse was on the resurrection of the dead.

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A CONTEXTUAL EVALUATION

A thesis

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

by

Daniel Dauda Gambo

March 2017

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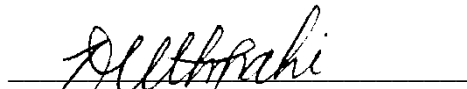
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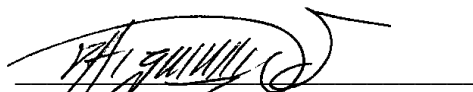
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To the North Central Nigeria Conference
of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Myriad of unresolved scholarly views abound concerning the phrasal expression “baptized for the dead” in 1 Corinthians 15:29. This is a solo passage in the scripture that made mention of this practice that is so alien to the Christian practice and tenets. Its enigmatic nature has posed a challenge of its misinterpretation and misapplication by some religious bodies that consequently incorporated in their doctrinal beliefs and practices the literal baptism of the dead. Paul’s major focus in the argument he presented was not just on “the resurrection” but however on “the resurrection of the dead.”¹

Further, baptism is generally described in the words of Ajibade Onolapo as “a gospel ordinance symbolizing the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.”² However, the forms and rituals of the various churches with regards to baptism vary, but it almost invariably involves the use of water and the Trinitarian invocation, “I baptize you: in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit.”³ This is accompanied by the

¹James D. G. Dung, “How Are the Dead Raised? With What Body Do They Come? Reflection on 1 Corinthians 15:29” *South Western Journal of Theology*, 7.

²Onolapo Ajibade, *Christ Our Savior: A Bible Study Guide* (Accra, Ghana: The Advent Press, 1996), 37.

³Ibid.

person being plunged under the water. In some traditions, the water is poured or sprinkled over the head of the candidate.

In the Old Testament, the word that is commonly used for Jewish rituals that is similar to baptism is *Mikvah*. W. F. Orr and J. A. Walter point out that, “*Mikvah* brings a change in status in regards to purification, restoration and qualification for full religious participation in the life of the community ensuring that the unclean person is not able to impose uncleanness on a property or its owner.⁴ The Qumran community are said to have had a cleansing rite which is similar to Christian baptism. Their life style was characterized by living an ascetic life and having their dwelling in the desert where they practiced an act of immersing themselves in the water daily as a means of cleansing.⁵

John the Baptist, a forerunner to Christ, used baptism as a rite for his messianic mission. This ordinance, performed by John, set a pedestal for baptism to be seen as an act of identifying one as having accepted Jesus Christ as a Savior. Baptism is an expression to Jesus’ command (Matt. 28:19-20), a public symbol of the saving faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Rom 10:10) and as an indication of repentance from dead works and dedication of one’s life to God (1 Pet 2:21). The command of Jesus to the disciples in (Matt. 28:19–20) to go into the world and preach the gospel and baptize people gave impetus to the establishment of the ordinance of baptism to be observed by the church in all ages (Mark 16:16).

⁴W. F. Orr & J. A. Walter, *1 Corinthians, Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 234.

⁵Charles M. Laymon, ed., *The Interpreter’s One-volume Commentary on the Bible: Introduction and Commentary for Each Book of the Bible Including the Apocrypha* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1971), 324.

The beneficiaries of this ordinance were men who were alive not dead as indicated in the baptism of John, at Jordan and the baptism of Peter on the day of Pentecost. Thus, throughout scripture it is clear that saving grace is granted to no one except the believer himself, on the basis of his personal faith. In a sense, faith can never be imputed from one person to another- no conversion by proxy.

However, we find a puzzling statement about “Baptism for the Dead” in 1 Corinthians 15: 29 a practice which appears to be so alien to the believers and in direct contradiction to what the rite entails as mentioned before. This text is the only text in the scriptures and one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament which has received a deluge of interpretations. This research therefore is designed to have a contextual study on the text particularly the phrase “Baptized for the dead.”

Statement of the Problem

Throughout the centuries, interpretative approaches to 1 Corinthians have been numerous and varied; most of the heated debate among the Bible scholars in an attempt to solve the difficult problem this text poses concern the phrases “baptized for the dead” or “baptized in their behalf” “baptized for the dead’s sake” and “those who are baptizing.” Some scholars view this in the metaphorical sense while others hold the view of literal interpretation. Another school of thought holds the view of Christian baptism in an attempt to find solution to the problem. This climate of unresolved scholarly debate has consequently paved a way to the emanation of further views and practices that are contradictory to the teaching of the author and the Scriptures in general about the dead and baptism. Therefore, this research attempts to find solution to this problem by identifying who are τῶν νεκρῶν (the dead)?

Purpose of the Study

From the problem identified above, the purpose of this research work is to determine the contextual meaning of ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν (for the dead) by investigating the meanings and usages of significant lexical items of 1 Corinthians 15:29; namely βαπτίζόμενοι, ὑπὲρ and νεκροὶ. To achieve this it is necessary to define the three categories of baptism: vicarious baptism, metaphorical baptism and Christian baptism that are enjoying wide acceptance and support as doctrine derived from or based on 1 Corinthians 15:29.

Significance of the Study

The major salience of this study derives from the fact that it addresses the doctrines derived from these myriad interpretations of 1 Corinthians 15:29; doctrines that definitely set Paul as directly contradicting or adding to the words of his Master, Jesus Christ. This study is significant for the further reason that as Seventh-day Adventists, we base our faith on the Bible and the Bible alone. Based on this, we radically disagree with some aspects of the doctrine of baptism upheld by other Christian denominations as Biblical based on 1 Corinthians 15:29. These aspects of baptism include doing penance/baptism for the dead or actually baptizing the dead.

This study seeks to offer an exegetically sound explanation of 1 Corinthians 15:29; an explanation that clearly defends the view of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on the issues arising from the misinterpretation of this text. The study shall therefore, be of value to Seventh-day Adventist field workers in particular and to Church members in general as people who are not only “rightly dividing the word of truth,” but also as those

who are always ready to “give an answer to every man that asketh us for a reason of the hope that is in us.”

Methodology and Procedure

The study is designed as an exegesis. This means that the study shall employ the recommended research instruments for their design. The elements of exegesis that are used in this study include contextual analysis (i.e. historical – literary and inter–textual contexts) and lexical–syntactical analysis (i.e. usages of and relationship between words).

Chapter one will identify the problem addressed by this study. It will set forth the procedure and methodology employed as well as the scope of purpose of this research. Chapter two will review the literature relevant to the subject and also look at the concept of Baptism in the Old and New Testaments. Chapter three will discuss the historical background of the author of the book, his audience and the entirety of the city of Corinth. Chapter four deals with the exegeses of the text; inter-textual and contextual studies will be done and other available tools for exegeses shall be employed so as to address the problem raised in this research. Also, summary of the findings as well as conclusion on the research will be drawn.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There are varied interpretations and explanations for 1 Cor. 15:29 among Bible scholars throughout church history. Many of these interpretations concern the phrases, “baptized for the dead” and “baptized in their behalf.”¹ In spite of all the exegesis on this passage it appears that a satisfactory solution has not been achieved.² For instance, Kistemaker posits: “Living members were baptized vicariously for those believers who had died but had not received the sacrament of baptism.”³ Further, the Greek preposition ὑπὲρ (for) in the phrase “for the dead” is interpreted to mean “above the graves of the dead.”⁴ In addition, “baptized for the dead” may mean that a Christian friend was baptized symbolically on behalf of a new convert who had died from martyrdom, although there is no mention of a major persecution in Corinth at the time of the production of the epistle.⁵ On his part, Craig S. Keener pointed out that, the phrase

¹Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the first Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker books, 1993), 167.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 372.

⁵Gleason L. Archer, “1 Corinthians 15: 29” *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 401-402.

“baptized for the dead” could mean the practice of washing the dead before they are buried which was prevalent among the Jews.⁶

However some other scholars see this text as referring to ordinary Christian baptism, ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν taken as meaning “with an interest to the resurrection of the dead,” i.e. in expectation of the resurrection.⁷ F.W. Grosheide, points out that, “The objection that the apostle could not have meant anything like a baptism for the benefit of others is exegetically out of place.”⁸ He further suggests two possible interpretations of the text: The first interpretation takes ὑπὲρ (for) locally and translates it by “above.” According to him, “this view implies that there were some at Corinth who had themselves baptized above the graves, namely of relatives who had died in Christ. This would then have been a way to express their unity and communion in Christ with the dead.”⁹ In stressing the second interpretation he points out that, the unbaptized who died during a persecution were reckoned as having been baptized in their death.¹⁰

⁶Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Backgrounds: New Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter varsity Press, 1993), 486-487.

⁷Samuel Rollers Driver, Alfred Plummer, Charles Augustus Briggs, ed. *The Internal Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament and New Testament: A Critical Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 1994), 359.

⁸F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 372.

⁹Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Backgrounds*, 486.

¹⁰F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 371.

Gordon D. Fee suggested that “those involved in this practice felt that baptism was necessary for entrance into the eschatological kingdom.”¹¹ But W. F. Orr states that they felt that baptism was necessary for salvation.¹² It is worthy of note that apart from this verse, there is no historical or biblical evidence of such practice in Corinth or elsewhere during the first century.¹³

Keener suggests that, “The expression baptized for the dead could also refer to the washings of the dead before burial.”¹⁴ The Mormon Church subscribes to and advocates for the idea of baptism for the dead. According to David Pratte:

The Mormon Church teaches that their members are responsible to be baptized for dead loved ones. If a person dies having never been baptized in this life, a Mormon relative can be baptized in his place. Then the person may have a chance after death to believe the gospel, repent and be saved. Seeking the dead in this manner is a Mormon’s greatest responsibility.¹⁵

It is important to note that no information abounds concerning this practice of baptism for the dead even though Church fathers like Tertullian made mention of it base

¹¹Gordon D. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians: New International Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 764.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Fredrick Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 818.

¹⁴Craig S. Keener *The IVP Bible Backgrounds*, 486.

¹⁵David E. Pratte, *Mormonis and the Book of Mormon Compared to the Bible* <http://www.gospelway.com/copyrite.html> 28/01/14.

on supposition.¹⁶ Other scholars argued that this baptism was in any case for the dead, i.e. for one self as dead in sin.¹⁷

It is possible the Apostle was asking the rhetorical question in order to challenge the position of those denying the resurrection of the dead while at the same time being reserved concerning the baptism on behalf of the dead.”¹⁸ Harold W. Mare states that: “This letter by Apostle Paul was reactive rather than proactive. ‘Baptism for the dead’ was a slogan used by trouble makers in Corinth who were denying the resurrection in order to make light of Paul’s efforts for the unenlightened or spiritually dead.”¹⁹ He further explains the baptism in the metaphorical sense to point to Paul’s trials and sufferings for the gospel while νεκροὶ refers to the spiritually dead or spiritually unenlightened.²⁰ Putting this into consideration, one may ask why are they, Paul and his companions, suffering for the sake of the lost if dead believers are not raised? Murphy O’Connor, however posits that 'dead' refers to spiritually dead.²¹ While some suggest that it is the administration of the sacrament over dead men’s graves.²²

¹⁶Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 372.

¹⁷F. F. Bruce, H. L. Ellision, G. C. D. Howley, *The International Bible Commentary: With the New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 1383–1384.

¹⁸Laymon, *The Interpreter’s One-volume Commentary on the Bible*, 254.

¹⁹W. Harold Mare, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977), 10:287.

²⁰Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Baptism in the Thought of St. Paul*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 102.

²¹Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “‘Baptized for the Dead’ 1 Corinthians 15:29: A Corinthian Slogan?” *Revue Biblique* 88 (October 1981): 536-37.

Interpretations of 1 Corinthians 15:29

There are scores of interpretations for 1 Corinthians 15:29. However, this aspect of research will only deal with those views that are enjoying the widest support and interpretation. These views are categorized into the following: (a) Metaphorical baptism, which refers to either the sufferings of Paul or his companions or martyrdom (b) Christian baptism which refers to the initiation rite that confirms the position of a believer in identifying with the body of Christ through water baptism; and (c) vicarious baptism, that is water baptism which is done by a living believer for the sake of a dead person possibly a relative or beloved one who had died without having being baptized.

Metaphorical Baptism

The scholars that hold to this view have different understanding on the interpretation of the passage. The two most populous views include those who see the passage as referring to martyrdom and referring to the sufferings of Apostle Paul for the sake of the gospel.

Martyrdom

Fredrick Godet Suggests that the phrase “baptized for the dead” as used in 1 Corinthians 15:29 means martyred and “for entering the place of the dead”²³ Here, Paul is here referring to those who have been baptized by blood (martyred) with the hope of resurrection as evidence for his argument that the resurrection is sure. In order to support

²²Everett F. Harrison, Bromiley G. W., Henry O. F. H. “Baptism for the Dead” in *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books House, 1960), 88.

²³Fredrick Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 215.

this idea, John Reuame states that “the use of the word ‘baptize’ by Jesus as evidenced in Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50 in which Jesus spoke of the baptism he must endure as a reference to his painful death on the cross.”²⁴ Considering the statement of Paul in 1Cor. 15:30-33 about his suffering unto death for the gospel, this interpretation seems to fit into the text. However, there are some notable weaknesses that seem to arise from this view. First, there is no record of persecution or the case of people being martyred at the time of the existence of the Church at Corinth.²⁵ Godet counters this argument by listing examples of martyrs in the New Testament era such as Stephen and James concluding that there were other cases of martyrdom that are not known.²⁶ Earle Cairns negates this view by stating that, “this argument from silence is doubtful in light of the historical data suggesting that the Church was experiencing a period of relative peace at that time.”²⁷ Second, while Jesus used “baptize” in the metaphoric sense denoting suffering or martyrdom, Paul did not employ this usage.²⁸

Paul’s Suffering

The phrase “baptized for the dead” is thought to be used in the metaphorical sense by denoting the suffering of the apostle Paul for the sake of the spiritually dead persons

²⁴Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians*, 215.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Eerle Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 90.

²⁸Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “‘Baptized for the Dead’ 1 Corinthians 15:29: A Corinthian Slogan?” *Revue Biblique* 88 (October 1981): 534.

particularly those whom they, Paul and his associates, were daily laboring for their salvation in Corinth.²⁹

Murphy O'Connor further suggests that the group in Corinth that was denying the resurrection of the dead was influenced by pre-gnostic views of Philo.³⁰ This view debunks the view of vicarious baptism as would be discussed later. This view also seems to be plausible hence Paul's mention of his suffering in 1Cor 15: 30-31. As pointed out by Godon Fees, this statement faces some difficulties of differing nuances of νεκροί in the immediate context.³¹ To support this idea, Reume posits that, "In its first occurrence it would have to be understood literally as the physically dead."³² Also, it is not made clear how an appeal to this alleged slogan would strengthen Paul's case for the certainty of the resurrection.³³ If the point of the alleged slogan was to demean Paul's efforts for the spiritually dead as O'Connor suggests, then why would the apostle include the slogan in the context where his struggles for the spiritually dead are given as evidence for the certainty of the resurrection? Commenting on the view of a slogan, D. A. Carson states that, "Little evidence exist that the phrase 'baptized for the dead' is a slogan, for it lacks some of the key characteristics of a slogan such as, brevity, sustained qualification and

²⁹John D. Reume, "Another Look at 1 Corinthians 15:29, 'Baptized for the Dead,'" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152.608 (October-December 1995), 461.

³⁰Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "'Baptized for the Dead' 1 Corinthians 15:29: A Corinthian Slogan?" *Revue Biblique* 88 (October1981): 534.

³¹Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*.

³²John Reume, Another Look at 1 Corinthians 15:25 "Baptized for the Dead." 461.

³³*Ibid.*

ambiguous response.”³⁴ O’Connor’s suggestion seems to meet the first characteristics but falls short on the rest, as Paul is seen as agreeing with the basic premise of alleged slogan rather than qualifying it.³⁵ Also there is no adversative to distinguish the slogan from his response to it (1Cor 6:12, 13; 7:1).³⁶ Fee further suggests that, “the assumption of Philo’s influence on the Corinthians in order to prove that the Corinthians would have used νεκροὶ in the sense of ‘spiritually dead’ is questionable at best.”³⁷

Christian Baptism

This theory refers to the initiation rite which confirms the position of a believer in identifying with the body of Christ. The phrase “baptized for the dead” is here understood in a literal sense; people were being baptized literally for those who have died. Some scholars posit that 1Cor 15:29 refers to Christian baptism in the normal sense of the initiation rite symbolizing the believer’s identification with Christ.³⁸ The variety of interpretation considered by these groups can be subdivided into the following sub views.

³⁴D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 55.

³⁵Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 764, 765.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸A.T Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1975), 359; G.G. Findlay, “St Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 2:931; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), 690; John F. MacArthur, *I Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 425, and J. K. Howard, ‘Baptism for the Dead; A Study of 1 Corinthians 15:29,’ in *Evangelical Quarterly* 37 (July-September 1965): 140.

Because of the Believers

This view is one of the most widely supported alternatives to vicarious baptism. The phrase “baptism for the dead” is held in the sense of “unbelievers being baptized because of believers who have died.”³⁹ This interpretation seems to suggest that unbelievers were making up their mind to join the ranks of Christians because of the influence of a believer who had died. This view is supported by several arguments. First, Paul used νεκροὶ with and without the definite article consistently in 1Cor 15 to differentiate between Christian dead and the dead in general.⁴⁰ In a sense the argument here is that τῶν νεκρῶν refers to the dead Christians. Also, the preposition ὑπὲρ with the genitive can have the causal sense of ‘because of.’⁴¹ J. Jeremias supports this view on the premise that in considering the context, Paul seems to return to his first argument on the absurdity of denying the believers resurrection which he concludes with specific discussion of Christian dead.⁴² However, G. G. Findlay disagrees with this view; he suggests that ‘if Paul had meant Christian dead’ he would have clarified his intention

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰M. Raeder, “Vikariatstaufe in 1 Corinthians 15:29?” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 46 (1956): 256-60; J. Jeremias, “Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God,” *New Testament Studies* 2 (1955-1956): 155.

⁴¹F. DeBlass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 121; Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 839.

⁴²J. Jeremias, “Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God,” 155.

when referring to the dead with more specific phrasing such as “dead friends” or dead relatives.⁴³

In Order to Be United with the Dead

Beasley Murray suggests that the preposition ὑπὲρ is functioning with the final sense of “for.”⁴⁴ Jeremias further argues that verse 29 refers to the “pagans who take baptism upon themselves for the dead with purpose of becoming united with their deceased Christian relatives at the resurrection.”⁴⁵ However, even though this preposition may have a final sense, this usage seems uncommon in the New Testament.⁴⁶ Further, A. G Mosley observes that, “this interpretation requires filling significant ellipses in order to convey this sense, such as ‘baptized in order to be united with their’ deceased Christian relatives at the resurrection.”⁴⁷

To Take the Place of Dead Believers

In considering the consistency in usage of “baptism” and “dead” in the Pauline thought, this position maintains the common substitutionary sense of ὑπὲρ without

⁴³G. G. Findlay, *Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900), 931.

⁴⁴G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 230.

⁴⁵Jeremias, “Flesh and blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God,” 156.

⁴⁶Heinrich Meyer, *Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1980), 367.

⁴⁷A. G. Moseley, “Baptized for the Dead,” *Review and Expositor* 49 (1952): 57-61; S. Lewis Johnson Jr., “1 Corinthians,” in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1962), 1257.

indicating that this action is vicarious or for the benefit of the dead.⁴⁸ However, this view holds its weakness: The act of new believers coming to replace believers who have died is not immediately having evidence in the context.⁴⁹

With Reference to the Resurrection of the Dead

This interpretation asserts that baptism for the dead refers to the general baptism of all believers in which they are baptized with reference to the dead.⁵⁰ Reume observes: “This view normally holds to an implied ellipses of resurrection in order to yield the meaning of baptism with reference to the resurrection of the dead.⁵¹ There is little support for this view other than the fact that it partially removes the theological weaknesses of vicarious baptism and that Christian baptism has the symbolic sense of being united with Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom 6:3-5). Also, apostle Paul elsewhere used the preposition ὑπὲρ to mean “with reference to” (2 Cor. 1:7; 8:23). A. T. Robertson and Alfred Plummer point out that: “The major argument against this view is that the implied ellipsis of ‘resurrection’ in the phrase ‘baptized with reference to the resurrection of the

⁴⁸Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 422; Meyer, Meyer’s *Commentary on the New Testament*, 367.

⁴⁹Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Note on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1962), 793.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹John D. Reaume, *Another Look at 1 Corinthians 15:29: “Baptized for the dead,”* 464.

dead' is too violent."⁵² Therefore, Paul would have probably employed resurrection if he meant that.

For Their Dying Bodies

This suggestion stresses that 1 Cor 15:29 is referring to the Christian baptism in which an individual is baptized so that his dying body can be the beneficiary. Several early Church fathers including Tertullian and Chrysostom ascribed to this position and it was later held by Erasmus.⁵³ It is observed in the writings of John Calvin a suggestion of a more specific nuance of unbelievers repenting and being baptized on their death beds.⁵⁴ Reume observes: "O'Neill has most recently espoused this position, citing additional evidence based on a tenuous deduction from textual evidence."⁵⁵ This view seems to avoid the theological difficulties of vicarious baptism and interprets baptize and ὑπὲρ in congruence with the common usage of Pauline writing. However, this view is weak in the

⁵²A. T. Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 359; and Thomas C. Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 432.

⁵³Tertullian Commented on this passage on two occasions and espoused the interpretation of Christian baptism for their dead or dying bodies (Anti Marcion 10; cf. De Resurrectione Carnis 48; cf. K.C Thompson, "1 Cor 15:29 and Baptism for the Dead," *Studia Evangelica* 2(1964): 654; Nicene and post Nicene Fathers, vol. 12st. Chrysostom, Homilies on I and II Corinthians (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 244.

⁵⁴John Calvin, *I and II Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 38; John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, trans. James Bryce, 7th ed., 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1873), 3:329. There is evidence of deathbed conversion in the early church (Calvin, *I and II Corinthians*, 37).

⁵⁵John D. Reume, Another Look at 1 Corinthians 15:29, "Baptized for the Dead." 334.

sense that, taking νεκροὶ to mean “dying bodies” is without ground in the New Testament.⁵⁶

Christian Baptism Based on Alternative Punctuation

It has been proposed by some scholars that the solution to this passage is by changing the punctuation of the verse.⁵⁷ It has been argued by Foschini that 1 Corinthians 15:29 consists of four rhetorical questions: (1) Ἐπεὶ τί ποιήσουσιν οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι; “If there is no resurrection what is the point of being baptized?” (2) ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν; “is it only to be united with the dead” (3) εἰ ὅλως νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται, τί καὶ βαπτίζονται; “if the dead do not rise again why they are baptized?” (4) ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν, “is it only to be united with them (i.e. the dead who will never rise)?”⁵⁸ On the other hand, Thompson K. C. suggests that verse 29 consists of two questions: (1) Ἐπεὶ τί ποιήσουσιν οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν εἰ ὅλως νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται, τί καὶ βαπτίζονται ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν; “Else what will they achieve who are baptized merely for the benefits of their dead bodies, if the dead bodies never rise again?” (2) τί καὶ βαπτίζονται ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν; “and why do people get baptized for them?”⁵⁹ However, this proposed punctuation changes may or

⁵⁶Gingrich, *A Greek –English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 534-35.

⁵⁷Bernard Foschini, “Those Who are Baptized for the Dead: 1 Corinthians 15:29, An Exegetical Historical Dissertation,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 12 (1950): 276-83; F. J. Badcock, “Baptism for the Dead,” *Expository Times* 54 (1942-43): 330.

⁵⁸Bernard Foschini, “Those Who are Baptized for the Dead: 1 Corinthians 15:29, An Exegetical Historical Dissertation.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 12 (1950): 278, 279.

⁵⁹K. C. Thompson, “1 Cor 15:29 and Baptism for the Dead,” *In Studia Evangelica*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964), 651.

may not be legitimate since accents, breathing marks and punctuations were not used during New Testament times.⁶⁰

Vicarious Baptism

This view holds that people got baptized on behalf of their dead loved ones who died without receiving baptism or catechumens.⁶¹ Fee suggests that, “those, *the ones baptizing for the dead*” involved in this practice felt that baptism was necessary for entrance into the eschatological kingdom.”⁶² (Italics supplied mine). While Orr suggests that “they felt that baptism was necessary for salvation.”⁶³ The strongest argument used by those who hold to this view is based on the plain reading of the verse because of the common usages of the words: βαπτίζόμενοι, νεκροὶ and ὑπὲρ.

However, this view faces two challenges: First, besides this verse, there is no historical or biblical evidence supporting such practice in Corinth or elsewhere during the first century⁶⁴ Although such practice has reference as holding in the late second century but it was limited to heretical groups which apparently instituted this practice due to the superficial understanding of this passage.⁶⁵

⁶⁰K. C. Thompson, “1 Cor 15:29 and Baptism for the Dead,” *In Studia Evangelica*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964), 651.

⁶¹W. F. Orr and J. A. Walter, *1 Corinthians, Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 337.

⁶²Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 767.

⁶³W. F. Orr, *1 Corinthians, Anchor Bible*, 337.

⁶⁴Robbertson and Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 359.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

Also, it is doubtful that Paul could appeal to this practice which was apparently contrary to his theology without commenting on it.⁶⁶ For most commentators, vicarious baptism for the dead implies that the Corinthians held a mystical view of baptism, although the exact nature of the benefit thought to be accrued to the dead varies. Some options would include its necessity for participation in the eschatological kingdom.⁶⁷

The clear teaching in the New Testament is that baptism has a personal character, with each individual being called to identify himself/herself personally with Christ in obedience to his command (Matt 28:18-20). Also “Pauline teaching makes it clear that baptism lacks saving efficacy. Paul taught with great vigor that personal faith alone is the sole condition for justification...baptism is simply an act of faith symbolizing a believer’s identification and union with Christ in His death and resurrection.”⁶⁸ As Reueme observes,

In light of Paul’s teaching on baptism, it is implausible that he would have referred to a practice so contrary to a fundamental aspect of his theology without commenting on it. This is especially true in 1 Corinthians, where Paul sought to correct various errors in the Church. The examples of believers taking each other to court and the issue of head coverings seem insignificant in comparison to the error of vicarious baptism for the dead.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Robbertson and Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 359.

⁶⁷Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 767; Thomas Charles Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1885), 423; Orr and Walter, *1 Corinthians*, 337.

⁶⁸Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1981), 755; George Eldon Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 548.

⁶⁹John D. Reueme, Another Look at 1 Corinthians 15:29 “Baptized for the Dead” 469.

Some have further argued that Paul elsewhere referred to practices with which he did not agree. Often cited is Paul's appeal to dining in the temple of an idol in 1 Cor 8:10.⁷⁰ In this case however, "Paul prevented any misunderstanding by specifically denouncing this practice in the course of his argument."⁷¹ One would expect Paul to have done the same in 1Cor 15:29 if he were referring to a practice of vicarious baptism.

Conclusion

So many interpretative approaches abound on the passage under study. Some of these approaches posit that the apostle was referring to his daily suffering and afflictions for the sake of the spiritually dead. Other scholars see the passage as having no any literal connotation but purely literal in the sense that there was a group of people who were involved in the practice of baptizing for other believers that had passed away without having the opportunity of receiving baptism before their demise. A close look at the flow of the thought of the writer particularly his employment of the literal sense of resurrection in the early part of the passage seems to accommodate the idea of literal baptism.

⁷⁰Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 215; Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NY: Nisbet, 1868), 33.

⁷¹Fredrick Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians*, 818.

CHAPTER 3

BAPTISM AND READING OF 1 CORINTHIANS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Baptism is described in the words of Peter Enns as, “the visible response to the gospel, reflecting the internal response to the gospel: The climactic moment in the journey of reconciliation of the believer with God.”¹ The term “Baptism” finds its root in the Greek word βαπτίζω which means “to immerse” “to plunge” “to dip.”² There are speculations about the origin of the rite of baptism as an initiatory rite into the Christian Church. The cleansing rites in the Old Testament which gives a proselyte Jew the access to the full participatory membership into Judaism and the acts of cleansing in the Qumran community is deemed by many as a precursor to John’s baptism and consequently to Christian baptism.

The Church in Corinth was rocked with so many issues such as factional, spiritual, ethical issues as well as the resurrection of the dead that were militating against its progress. Paul dealt with these issues based on their merits and proffered solutions accordingly.

¹Peter Enns and Mark Strauss, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 168.

²Carl F. H. Henry, *Contemporary Evangelical Thought: Basic Christian Doctrines* (USA: Renehert and Winston, 1962), 256.

Similarities of Christian Baptism

There have been various suggestions as to the origins of Christian baptism; Jewish proselyte immersion, ceremonial washings, Qumran purification rites, the baptism of John. Thus, the common practice of water rituals in the ancient times put the ancient people in a better position to easily grasp the concept and symbolism of baptism than the modern readers. It is held by some scholars that the concept of this act is traceable to the Old Testament law which stipulates certain washings or cleansing of sick persons. Carl Henry buttresses this point further, “proselytes entering Judaism were expected to strip themselves of their former clothing, submit to circumcision, and bath themselves completely after which they were reckoned members of the Jewish community. This rite was an acknowledgement of defilement and acceptance of law as a purifying agent.”³ Further, Leyland Ryken states that, “The Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Hittites, and Hebrews used water in purification rituals.”⁴

Although the term “baptism” is not used to describe the Jewish rituals, the purification rites in Jewish laws and tradition called *Tevilah* have some similarities to Christian baptism and the two have been linked. *Tevilah* is described as “the act of immersion in natural sourced water called a ‘*mikvah*’”⁵

³Leyland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tramper Longman ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery: An Encyclopedic Exploration of the Images, Symbols, Motifs, Metaphoric Figure of Speech and Literary Patterns of the Bible* (Downer Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), 72, 73.

⁴Ibid.

⁵http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_baptism, accessed July 1, 2015.

This rite was an acknowledgement of defilement and acceptance of law as a purifying agent.⁶ The baptism of John is considered to have found its root in this rite of cleansing in the history of Israel. It is worthy of note that this practice of accepting the converts into Judaism did not exist until after their return from Babylonian captivity.⁷ Long before the Jews practiced baptism, this rite was found in the Old Testament. For instance, the passing of the children of Israel through the red sea on the final day of the unleavened bread was likened to a baptism by Paul (1 Cor 10:1, 2). In the days of Jesus, baptism was not absolutely new to the people of his days. The Persians, the Hindus and the Egyptians all had their religious purification rites.⁸ Besides the physical water baptism which demonstrates an outward acceptance to be part of Jewish or Christian faith the scripture also speaks of baptism in the metaphoric sense (Matt 3:11-12). The baptism of fire here depicts the future suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

Jewish Proselyte Immersion

It is a known fact that there are different types of baptism. This aspect of this research is therefore aimed at looking into this by exploring the root of this rite in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament there was the law of ceremonial bathing of a person who was considered unclean in Lev 14, 15 and 16.⁹ G. Beasley-Murray buttresses this

⁶Carl F. H. Henry, *Contemporary Evangelical Thought: Basic Christian Doctrines*, 256.

⁷http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Baptism, accessed July 1, 2015.

⁸Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (East Peoria: Versa Press Inc., 2005), 622.

⁹Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology 1* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press 1975), 151, 152.

point as “an outward and visible sign which has an outward and spiritual cleansing.”¹⁰ Likewise, Ezekiel 36:25 conveys a similar idea of washing and cleansing by water which indicates inward transformation and conversion of a person. Walter Eichrodt states: “Water purification was the symbol for the inward purification as the sinner turns to from idols.”¹¹

The issue that the Jewish proselyte immersion was the antecedent of the baptism of John has been suggested and much debated.¹² According to the law (Gen 7:12-14; Exod 12:48-49), the only requirement for the proselytes was circumcision, while rabbinic tradition states three basic requirements: circumcision for men, immersion in water (for men and women) and the acceptance of a sacrifice. The immersion was required as initiatory ritual both in which the convert cleansed himself of his transgressions and impurities and emerged from the bath as a new born child.¹³ Therefore, the question here is: when did the practice of proselyte immersion develop and instated for the proselytes?

According to the Jewish immersion theory, it is strongly held that the Jewish Proselyte immersion must have had influence on the baptism of John.¹⁴ Furthermore, the OT, the Apocrypha, the NT, Philo, Josephus and the older Targumists keep silent on

¹⁰G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: WMB. Eerdmans, 1962), 7.

¹¹Walther Eichrodt, *Old Testament Library*, “Ezekiel” (Gottingen: SCM Press, 1986), 98.

¹²Lawrence H. Sciffman, *Who Was a Jew: Rabbinic and Hallakhic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism* (Hobokan, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 1985), 19.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Oscar Cullman, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 9.

proselyte immersion.¹⁵ Their coincidental complete silence can't be judged by accident. Further, Oscar Cullman points out that, "admission of a proselyte was by circumcision only."¹⁶

Ablution in the Greco-Roman World

The rite of immersion has been wide spread in both the eastern and western world.¹⁷ Most religions included the rite of ablution. The universal rite is based on the idea that man needs to be purified and renewed in order to approach God and worship him.¹⁸ Thomas asserts that, "There were widespread Jewish baptizing movements in Palestine before 70 CE. ... The earliest Jewish group that practiced ablution was the Essenes." He further suggests as other possible antecedents of John's baptism the Jewish sect including the Bannus, the Hemerobaptist, the Nasareans, the Masbuthaeans, the Sabaeans and the Baptist in Sybylline oracles.¹⁹ Bannus is said to be bathing himself in water as a means of obtaining purity."²⁰ According to H. H. Rowley, "The washing of the whole body in the river in association with curtailing wicked behavior, practicing

¹⁵Oscar Cullman, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 9.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷David S. Dockey, Baptism in the New Testament: *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 43 (2001): 5.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Joseph Thomas, *Le Mouvement Baptiste en Palestine et Syrie* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1935), 4.

²⁰*Ibid.*

honorable piety and pleading the forgiveness of sin will stop the wrath of God.”²¹ However, the rite of ablution practiced by this sect is distinguished from the baptism of John in both mode and purpose. “The mode of the sect’s rite of ablution was self-administered immersion while that of John was baptism, i.e. immersion by John himself.”²² The purpose of the group concerns ritual cleansing whereas for John that of the baptism for the repentant in preparation for the forgiveness of sins and the messianic baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire with only limited number of qualified Jews allowed to join the sect whereas John called on the whole nation to repentance.²³

Baptism in the New Testament

The New Testament teaches that baptism is a participation in the death of Christ and His resurrection (Rom 6:3-5). It is the conversion of the inner person, pardoning and cleansing of the impurity (Heb 10:22; 1Cor 1:11).

Baptism of John

John the Baptist who is considered a forerunner to Christ, used baptism as the central rite of his messianic movement.²⁴ This ordinance, performed by John set a pedestal for baptism to be seen as an act of identifying one as having accepted Jesus Christ as Savior. Some religious communities teach that Baptism is necessary for salvation as part of the entire baptismal arrangement, as an expression of obedience to

²¹Rowley H. H., “*The Baptism of John & the Qumran Sect*” (Manchester: Manchester Uni. Press, 1964), 15.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Laymon, *The Interpreter’s One-volume Commentary on the Bible*, 9:431.

Jesus' command (Mathew 28:19–20), as a public symbol of the saving faith in the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Roman 10:10) and as an indication of repentance from dead works and the dedication of one's life to God (1 Peter 2:21).²⁵

John's background. In order to have a good understanding of the baptism of John, it is important to have a brief knowledge about who John was, his background and his way of life. According to the evidence found in the gospels, especially that of Luke, John the Baptist was born during the time Herod was a king in Judea (Luke 1:5). George Eldon Ladd addresses John the Baptist as “a new prophet.”²⁶ However the Scriptures describes John's status as more than a prophet; he is a messenger who precedes the Lord Jesus and he is greater than all men born (Luke 7:27, 28).²⁷ Commenting on his ministry Ladd states:

The significant of the ministry of John the Baptist can be appreciated only against the historical setting of the times. For centuries the living voice of prophet had not been stilled. No longer did God speak directly through a human voice to his people to declare his will, to interpret the reason for the oppression of Israel by the gentiles to condemn their sins, to call for national repentance, to ensure judgment if repentance was given and to promise deliverance when the nation responded.²⁸

John and the Qumran community. The gospel reports that John preached and baptized in the river Jordan (Matt 3), which is believed to be near the Qumran

²⁵Laymon, *The Interpreter's One-volume Commentary on the Bible*, 9:431.

²⁶George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 35.

²⁷William Brownlee, *John the Baptist in the New Light of the Ancient Scrolls* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 33.

²⁸Ibid.

community.²⁹ The Qumran community practiced a rite of cleansing as John baptized people.³⁰ Thus, the relationship between John and the Qumranians is much debated by upon scholars. The first person to suggest the possibility of connection between John and the community was William Brownlee in 1950.³¹ He posits that, “in view of John’s thorough acquaintance with Essenes thought, it is not at all improbable that John had spent his childhood in the wilderness, being brought up by Essenes which choose another person’s children while they were pliable and fit for learning and form them according to their own manners.”³² The community is believed to have been established during the reign of John Hyrcanus (135 BCE – 1104 BCE) by “the teacher of righteousness who was a leader of Essenes.³³ He interpreted the Torah strictly for the interpretation of God’s imminent judgment,³⁴ and thus formed a special *hallakout* regulating daily life. He attempted to force the practice of the interpretation on all the members. And eventually the majority of the members disapproved the *hallakout* and refused to follow him.³⁵

However, many key theological perspectives of John were clearly distinct from Qumran theology. For instance, Michael Newton states that:

²⁹Brownlee, *John the Baptist in the New Light of the Ancient Scrolls*, 17.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹William Brownlee, *John the Baptist in the New Light of the Ancient Scrolls*, 33.

³²Ibid.

³³Garcia F. Martinez, *The History of the Qumran Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 196.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

John's role was prophetic, whereas the role of the Qumranians was esoteric. John called the whole nation to repentance, whereas the sect allowed only few selected Jews to enter the community. John's baptism was a onetime baptismal rite, whereas the sect's rite of ablution was self-administered immersion and practiced daily or frequently. John's baptism was characterized as baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sin while Qumranians ablution was related only to ritual cleansing.³⁶

A number of scholars assumed that John who lived near the community would have had some contact with it or would have adopted some of its teachings³⁷ but do not accept that he was one of its members.

On the other hand, some scholars strongly criticize any easy identification of John with the community. Rowley H. H. states, "All attempts for drawing a possible connection between them are based on nothing but conjuncture. Scholar's attempt to connect John with the community is still in the realm of wishful thinking and it's not objective scholarship."³⁸

Baptism in the Theology of Paul

This aspect is aimed at looking at those passages about baptism in the Pauline writings so as to integrate it with the issue at stake within the larger context of his teaching on baptism. There may be other passages that discuss the issue but only few passages will be explored in this work.

³⁶Michael Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 243.

³⁷William H. Brownlee, *John the Baptist in Light of the Ancient Scrolls*, 35; Garcia F. Martinez, *The History of the Qumran Community*, 196; David S. K. Dockey, *Baptism in the New Testament*; 134.

³⁸H. H. Rowley, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament* (London: The Talbot Press, 1967), 218.

Romans 6:1-14

This passage is often spoken of as the *locus classicus*, meaning “a passage that has become a standard for elucidation of a word or subject of Paul’s understanding of the concept of baptism.”³⁹ James D. G. Dunn buttresses the point further, “in view of the important role this passage has played in discussions of baptism, it is important to note that baptism is not the subject of the passage. The theme is one of death to sin and life under grace which is documented by use of baptismal language.”⁴⁰ The major focus of death to sin and life in Christ spoken of in Romans 6:1-14 is not on the literal dying of the believer as such but his spiritual death and life in Christ.⁴¹ Hull points out that, “the death to sin and life in Christ spoken of in Rom 6 dovetails with the conclusion of the first part of Romans on the salvific power of the gospel especially with Romans 5 & 7.”⁴² Joseph A. Fitzmyer observes that, the new life that came through Christ consequents in a total transformation of human beings and that partaking in the rite of baptism symbolizes identification in Christ death and resurrection. As such a new life of godliness is evidenced in one’s life.⁴³

³⁹Michael F. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor 15: 29): An Act of Faith in the Resurrection (Society of Biblical Literature, 2005)*, 241.

⁴⁰James D. G. Dunn, *Word Bible Commentary vol. 38A: Romans 1-8* (Word Pub.: Milton Keynes, UK, 1988), 308.

⁴¹Michael F. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor 15:29): An Act of Faith in the Resurrection*, 242.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *According to Paul: Studies in the Theology of the Apostle* (New York: Paulist, 1993), 236.

The believer is expected to die to sin through identifying himself with Christ. This experience brings new life that changes the entire life of the believer, it brings freedom from sin. Death with Christ is life anew and baptism into Christ is baptism into his death. Just as Christ was raised the believer is also raised into newness of life.⁴⁴

Other than the references to baptism in the book of Romans, other passages that speak on this subject in the Pauline epistles are Ephesians and Colossians. In Ephesians 4:5, 6 we read, “One Lord one faith one baptism (βάπτισμα), one God and father of all who is above all, and through all and in you all.” Beasley Murray states that, “The accent is on the unity of the Christian faith. It stresses the dignity and importance accorded to baptism in virtue of its inclusion in this enumeration of the great ‘unities’ of our faith.”⁴⁵ Here baptism is linked to faith in order to highlight the interrelationship of the two. In Eph. 4:4–6 the mention of baptism is made to challenge the Ephesians to be in unity with one another.⁴⁶

Colossians 2:11-13 also articulates baptism as a visible and effective sign analogous to circumcision. Believers are buried with him in baptism and are raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. This passage identifies more closely with the Lord’s baptism; the believer is reminded that he shares in

⁴⁴Fitzmyer, *According to Paul: Studies in the Theology of the Apostle*, 236.

⁴⁵Beasley G. R Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 334.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 248.

the resurrected life of Christ and therefore, ought to set his mind on higher things. Those who were ones dead have now become the living.⁴⁷

Historical Context of 1 Corinthians

St Paul is mentioned twice in the book as its own author (1 Cor. 1: 1, 2; 16:21). Paul's authorship is almost unanimously accepted throughout biblical scholarship.⁴⁸ Further, in his era when letters were written instead of placing the name of the writer at the end as practiced in the modern custom, ancient Greek put the name at the beginning in order to allow the reader to identify the author first.⁴⁹ An external evidence for the authorship of the book is the witness of Clement of Rome one of the early church fathers.⁵⁰

Paul's Christian journey began when he had a theophanic encounter with the Lord on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians. Paul identifies himself as a Jew (Rom 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22), a Pharisee and an apostle of Jesus Christ (Phil 3:5; Rom.1: 1, 5). His birth place was Tarsus (Acts 21: 39), a Roman province. It was believed that Paul came in contact with various cultures, religious beliefs and philosophies of the stoics and

⁴⁷Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 248.

⁴⁸Earld D. Radmacher ed., *Nelson NKJV Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1911), 583.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

the epicureans.⁵¹ This exposure invariably impacted his world view and made him an informed person, preparing him to interact with the Gentiles so as to win them to Christ.⁵²

The City of Corinth

Corinth was known as a prominent Roman colony, a big city where commercial activities were flourishing. This climate boosted its population pressure and consequently attracted people from all walks of life with differing religious ideologies and persuasions as well as varied cultures.⁵³ This is further buttressed in the words of Hull thus: “As a center of wealth and culture, Corinth was a leading city in the political struggle among Macedonians the southern city state of Greece, and eventually the Roman Empire. A service economy as prosperous as Corinth no doubt attracted residents and business men from throughout the region.”⁵⁴

Religion in Corinth. Corinth was known for its worship of so many deities. Gordon Fee said that there were “twenty six sacred places devoted to the ‘gods many’ (the Roman Greek pantheon) and mystery cults with the Jewish synagogue with the

⁵¹The Epicureans are the philosophers that followed the teachings of Epicurus 341-270 BC. They see pleasure in its generality as the highest point of everything in this life. Life is viewed as ending here without going beyond. In a sense, when you die there is no hope of resurrection. The stoics were the philosophers who followed Zeus (337-263). They were quoted by Paul in Acts 17:28. Their world view is based on pantheism, the existence of God in everything and continued consciousness at death.

⁵²Tom Udoh and Sampson Nwaomah, *Paul: His ministry and Writing* (Jos, Nigeria: Fab Anieh, 2012), 131.

⁵³Norman P. Madsen *First & Second Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 7.

⁵⁴Hull Michael, *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor 15: 29): An Act of Faith in the Resurrection.* 139.

inscription ‘synagogue of the Hebrew.’⁵⁵ Prominent among these gods were, Poseidon (or Neptune) god of sea and earthquake which was respected throughout the region. The second most important deity was Aphrodite, the goddess of love, sexuality and reproduction. There were temple prostitutes associated with Aphrodite, over a thousand in number who had been dedicated to the service of the goddess by both men and women. It was believed that the city owed much of its wealth in the Greek era to their success in attracting visitors especially the sailors.⁵⁶

The church in Corinth and its early crises. The church in Corinth was established by Paul after painstaking efforts. On his arrival at Corinth he first met with a couple, Priscilla and Aquila and established a good relationship with them. It is suggested by some scholars that this couple were already Christians since there is no record showing that they were converted to Christianity.⁵⁷ His work resulted in a huge success which consequently ignited opposition and antagonism and he eventually left for Ephesus. While in Ephesus he exchanged letters with the Christians in Corinth tackling the issues that were plaguing the Church. Marrion L. Soard said: “The church had fallen into arguing, forming cliques within the larger congregation issues as sexual relations, marriage, divorce, the eating of foods associated with pagan gods, the use of spiritual gifts in the assembly of the church, orderly behavior in worship, resurrection of the dead

⁵⁵Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1987), 3.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Marrion L. Soard ed., *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 2.

and collection that Paul was assembling for the relief of the poor in Jerusalem.”⁵⁸ Thus, the letter was an attempt to address these issues.

Corinthian Christianity and its Early Crises

We have discussed about Paul, a devout Jew who later became an apostle of Jesus Christ, and the city of Corinth where he labored as an evangelist in AD 50. His evangelistic efforts at Corinth yielded much fruit; Churches were established and the word of God gained a stronger foothold on daily basis. However, there were crises that rocked the Church as seen from 1 Corinthians. Before we look at the crisis of faith in the resurrection of the dead, we turn to the issues of factionalism, ethics and spirituality in the hope that an examination of these crises will shed light on the crisis of faith in the resurrection of the dead which is the thrust of this work. However, it is important to note that 1 Corinthians does not only presents a Church that was rocked with crises but solutions to those crises were proffered as well.⁵⁹

Moreover, there are many opinions as to the reason for the crises as upheld by some scholars.⁶⁰ For instance, J. C. Hurd lays the blame of the crises on Paul, maintaining that, “Paul changed his teaching and thereby caused confusion among the Corinthians.”⁶¹ However, Hull observes that “the difficulty is to draw the line between the old and the

⁵⁸ Soard, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series*, 2.

⁵⁹Hull Michael, *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor 15:29):169: An Act of Faith in the Resurrection*, 139.

⁶⁰B. W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 25.

⁶¹J. C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (New York: Seabury, 1965), 88.

new teachings, something that Hurd fails to do adequately even with a carefully constructed table.”⁶²

That there were a number of crises that plagued the Church at Corinth between Paul’s departure from Corinth and his authoring of the book of First Corinthians is obvious. And the understanding of these crises at Corinth is closely linked with the literary structure and integrity of the book itself.

Factionalism

The first major crisis that is mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians is that related to forming factions. This crisis is captured and the solution proffered in 1Cor 1:10, 11 while the categories of is dealt with in chapters 1-4. Verse 11 presents the problem clearly, that there is quarreling among them. Paul stated the problem of discord in terms of leadership in the community (1:12-17); he spoke about wisdom and its proper discernment (1:8-3:4); he then returns to leadership in the community (3:5-23); and particularly to his own leadership (4:1-13).⁶³ He, further concludes that he did not write so as to shame them but to admonish them, especially the arrogant once among them; and to ask their imitation of himself. Schussler Fiorenza supports this by stating that, “He [Paul] wants his converts to stand firm, not only in the Lord, but also in their loyalty to him.”⁶⁴

⁶²Michael Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor15: 29): An Act of Faith in the Resurrection*, 178.

⁶³N. A. Dahl, “Paul and the Church at Corinth according to 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21,” in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies presented to John Knox* (ed. W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, and R. R. Niebuhr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 320-21; Gordon Fee, *First Corinthians*, 50-51.

⁶⁴Schussler E. Fiorenza, *Rhetorical Situation and Historical Reconstruction in 1 Corinthians.*” *Missouri State University* 33 (1987): 386-403.

Peter F. Ellis proposes a structure so as to give the picture of this crisis at a glance: A (1-10-2:15), the source of the problem, the cross and wisdom; B (2:6-16), a mature understanding of the cross and wisdom; and A` (3:1-4:21), advise about teachers.⁶⁵ Therefore, “Paul gets his point across clearly and at the same time spares the feelings of the troublesome Corinthian teachers and their overenthusiastic followers. In this particular case, Paul’s chiastic format constitutes a powerful argument for the unity of everything he says in 1:10-4:21).”⁶⁶ There was factionalism in the community that some of them were claiming allegiance to Paul, Appolos, Cephas, or Christ. Paul tackled this situation by admonishing them to make Christ the only center of their service in the community of faith. In this way Paul exercises caution by disengaging himself from any of the groups including those who claimed loyalty to him but urged them to pay their loyalty to Jesus and him crucified. He did not indict Appolos nor Cephas but rather the Corinthians themselves. In describing the nature of the problem Hull opines that, “the problem lies not with Appolos or Cephas. The problem lies in the fact that there is unwarranted dissension among them that is most likely doctrinal in nature, i.e., they disagree on some points and invoke an authority to support their positions. Fee posits that, “the details of their argument remains unknown.”⁶⁷

Further, Paul speaks of the community as a building which he, as a wise builder, laid the foundation, which is Christ (3:11). Here, Paul borrows the structure and the

⁶⁵Peter F. Ellis, *Seven Pauline Letters* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1982), 45-58.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Gordon Fee, *First Corinthians*, 55-56.

vocabulary of Pagan temple construction contracts,⁶⁸ with which the Corinthians were familiar with. Ancient contracts stipulated that, “If any man did damage to a foundation or construction project, the builder will do harm to him.”⁶⁹ In the spiritual realm, Paul states that if any man does harm to God’s temple, God will do harm to him.⁷⁰ In a sense, Paul was saying that the spirit of dissension which was advanced by the Corinthians that was capable of destroying the Church which Paul and Appolos have collaborated their efforts to build attracts a punitive measure of destruction as well.

Ethical Issues (1 Corinthians 5-11)

It was reported to Paul that there was a case of immoral act among the Corinthians, an immorality that is offensive even to pagans, for a man is living with his father’s wife (5:1). This situation calls for community mourning and demands that the offender should be removed from the community (5:2-13). From here Paul moves to the denunciation of sin of sexual immorality. He goes a step further to express his disapproval of the community’s mistaken tolerance over the reported immorality that was happening among them. Here Paul treats the problem of the personal morality of the man in question as one problem and the forbearance of the community as another problem.⁷¹ It is noteworthy that the fifth does not only deal on immorality, but also of Church discipline. Paul’s call to the community to act in this regard is linked with Deut 17:2-7.

⁶⁸Gordon Fee, *First Corinthians*, 55-56.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Hull Michael, *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1Cor 15:29): An act of Faith in the Resurrection*, 234.

The immorality is described as a man living with his father's wife. Taking Lev 18:8 into cognizance the woman is likely to be his step mother. It is possible that the woman in question might have been his father's divorced wife or concubine, legitimate or not.⁷² This act is condemned by both Jewish law (Lev 18:7-29; Deut 22:30; 27:20) and Roman law. The problem was not something that had happened but was ongoing.⁷³ The punitive measure to be met on the erring one in verse 5 is severe: that person should be "delivered over to Satan as for the destruction of the flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Furthermore, the Corinthians had deficiency in union as evidenced in the lawsuit that was prevalent among them in 1 Corinthians 6. 1 Corinthian 5 and 6 are closely related both in theme and literary structure. Again, the issue is one of proper Christian community behavior. He points out that, disputes instead of being settled among the community of believers were being taken to outsiders. Hull states that, "Greco-Roman civil society allowed for at least three other methods of conflict resolution beside formal civil adjudication, i.e., arbitration, conciliation, and compromise."⁷⁴ Paul's experience had also exposed him to the corrupt practices of the Roman litigation.⁷⁵ "It does not seem that the Corinthian Christians felt a sense of disgust over the way in which the local legal

⁷²R. F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, 209; Barrett, *First Corinthians*, 122.

⁷³Gordon Fee, *First Corinthians*, 200.

⁷⁴Michael Hull, *Baptized on the Account of the Dead (1 Cor 15:29): An Act of Faith in the Resurrection*, 187.

⁷⁵B. W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 58-68.

system operated. On the contrary, they endorsed it by taking cases to it.”⁷⁶ In 1 Cor 6: 11-12, Paul tells them that this is the lifestyle they should have renounced. It was in the community where they were justified and made clean with the blood of Christ that they are to settle their disputes.

Paul also presented another picture of the Corinthians as contained in 1 Cor. 6:12-20, where he enjoined them to separate themselves from the sinful practices of the society in which they found themselves. “The first century Romans enjoyed great laxity in terms of gluttony, drunkenness and sexual liberty. It was common for them to gather, especially at civic festivals and dinners, to engage therein. The east of the empire had a long history of the unholy trinity of eating, drinking, and immorality at dinners.”⁷⁷ Therefore, he ask, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you which you have from God?” (v. 19).

In 1 Cor. 7:1 Paul switched from the report he heard from the house of Chloe or Stephanas and company or both to that which the Corinthians wrote to him: “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote.” So chapter 7 is the response to the Corinthians question about marriage. Paul approached this issue on three platform: general instruction about marriage (7:1-16), general recommendations about stability (7:17-24), and general advise about celibacy (7:25-40). Paul reiterates that celibacy is a viable option. He suggests celibacy while at the same time stating plainly that there is nothing wrong with marriage.

⁷⁶Michael Hull, *Baptism on the Account of the Dead (1 Cor 15:29): An Act of Faith in the Resurrection*, 187.

⁷⁷B. W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 81-82.

Another issue was that of food offered to idols. Hull states: “One of the more pressing problems for nascent Christian communities in the Greco-Roman world was the extent of their participation in the broader sociopolitical and cultural milieus in which they found themselves. That problem seems to have come to particular notice in the question of eating food offered to idols.”⁷⁸ The Corinthians were not sure of Christian position towards food offered to idols, i.e. there were some disagreements among them and they needed understanding from Paul. In an attempt to find answers to their questions in this regard, Paul showcases the futility of the idols (8:6); idol food means nothing and so Paul does not have a problem with those eating it unless the liberty becomes a stumbling block for the weak (8:9-10).

Paul further turns his attention to the issues connected to worship. First he pointed out that their quarrels extend to the commemoration of the Lord’s Supper. Related to worship is the issue of propriety of head coverings or veiling for men and women at prayer. According to Paul, men ought to unveil their heads while women should cover their heads while praying while Richard Oster argues the opposite.⁷⁹

Spiritual Issues (1 Corinthians 12-14)

Here, Paul makes a move from worship and decorum to gifts of the spirit (τῶν πνευματικῶν). It appears that spiritual issues came up at prayer meetings as seen in 14:12. Probably, Paul was responding to a query that was raised by the Corinthians letter

⁷⁸Michael Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor 15:29): An act of Faith in the Resurrection*, 191.

⁷⁹Richard Oster, “When Men Wore Veils to Worship: The Historical Context of 1 Corinthians 11:4,” *New Testament Studies* volume 34 (1988) 481-505, accessed March 14, 2017, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/new-testament-studies>.

(cf. 5:9; 7:1). However, as Ellis states, “In the whole of Paul’s discussion of the gifts in chapters 12-14, one major problem stands out: what was the situation in the Corinthian community that prompted the Corinthians to ask Paul the question ‘concerning spiritual gifts (12:1)?’” In chapters 12-14 we find out that the issue at stake was that related to glossolalia. The focus of chapter 12 is a unity of gifts as it is applicable in the community. Chapter 13 speaks about love which is more important than speaking in tongues. And chapter 14 is on practical counsel on speaking in tongues. Paul seems not to have problem with speaking in tongues as such, for he speaks in tongue more than the Corinthians do (14:18), but “the problem is almost certainly an abuse of the gift of tongues.”⁸⁰ Ellis observes a parallel that can be seen in chapters 12-14 regarding spiritual issues. The first part, chapter 12 (A) has to do with the gift of the spirit in general. The second part, chapter 13 (B) concerns the preeminence of love, while the third part chapter 14 (A`) treats glossolalia.⁸¹ Paul stressed that there are a variety of gifts which are not possessed by one person alone. “With this emphasis Paul puts the hybrids, those who consider themselves to be people of the Spirit (cf. 14:37) in their place. Anyone within the community who disdains the gift given to any member disdains the work of the Spirit.”⁸² In order to stress on unity, Paul likens the community to the human body as a

⁸⁰Gordon Fee, *First Corinthians*, 571.

⁸¹Peter F. Ellis, *Seven Pauline Epistles* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1982), 91-92.

⁸²R. F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, 450.

model for the body of Christ. He points out that, members of the body of Christ are unified by the Spirit in baptism.⁸³

The progression of his thought in the second part 13:1-13) places emphasis on the love as the key element in the use of the tongues. “Without love the gifts of the tongues rings hollow.”⁸⁴ Thus, love should be the foundation of faith in all ramifications of Christian lifestyle. The third part is Paul’s treatment of glossolalia (14:1-40). Here, Thiselton notes that, “the key element to an accurate understanding of Paul’s arguments and declarations in this chapter depends on a full appreciation of two factors initially: (a) vv1-25 relate integrally to what Paul has said about love in 13:1-13); (b) vv. 26-40 reflects concerns about differentiation and ordering which Paul has expounded in 12:4-31.”⁸⁵ In summary, verses 1-25 are mostly concerned with the needs of others while verses 26-40 have to do with peaceful organization.⁸⁶

The Resurrection of the Dead (1 Corinthians 15)

Chapter 15 of the book of first Corinthians presents an extensive discussion of Paul about the dead where we also find the thrust that this work is investigating, “baptism of the dead” in vs. 29. This chapter appears to be a response to oral reports that were

⁸³Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Baptism in the Thoughts of St. Paul: A Study in Pauline Theology*, trans G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), 83-85; Gordon Fee, *First Corinthians*, 603-606.

⁸⁴R. F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, 471.

⁸⁵A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 1074.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

brought to Paul. The structure below as presented by Hull will be taken into consideration:

- A. Christ is raised, a fact attested by the authority of witnesses and by Paul (vv. 1-11)
- B. Explanation that, there is resurrection of the body, first Christ and then those who belong to him (vv. 12-28)
- C. Active, practical witnessing to the resurrection (vv. 29-34)
- B` Explanation of how, the resurrected body is a spiritual body, since a physical (natural) body is raised as a spiritual body (vv. 35-49)
- A` Christians will be raised, a fact attested by Paul and the authority of mystery (vv. 50-58)

As noticed in the structure above, Paul's emphasis in stressing the fact of resurrection of Christ (A) goes with his emphasis for the fact of the resurrection of Christians (A`). Also Paul's explanation of the resurrection of the body, that there is resurrection (B) parallels his explanation of the spiritual body, how there is a resurrection (B`). And fixed in between this parallelism is Paul's attestation of active practical witnessing to the resurrection (C).

The first section of chapter 15 (vv. 1-11) is concerned with ascertaining the authenticity of the resurrection through the testimonies of the witnesses. Paul began by telling the Corinthians the good news he has once handed over to them except they had believed in vain. (vv. 1-2). "There is nonetheless, a proviso. Those to whom the gospel is preached are saved under the condition that they

hold fast to what they have heard.”⁸⁷ As Reuame observes, the statement of Paul that follows in vs. 3 “I handed unto to you as of first importance what I had received,” implies that Paul wanted to tell the Corinthians that they should not be different from him on the matters to follow. Paul goes ahead to tell the Corinthians about the eye witnesses in order to substantiate his claim about the resurrection of Christ further.⁸⁸ Perhaps the reason for capturing these witnesses in the discourse of Paul may well be explained in the words of Jan Lambrecht:

Not only do the appearances mentioned by Paul refer not to pre-paschal experiences but to insight and sight which occurred after the Easter event, not only does their mention possess a confirmatory function with regard to the reality of Jesus resurrection without which believers hope of their own resurrection could not be maintained, but that mention is very much needed, it would seem, because these appearances must still ‘prove Jesus’ resurrection, about which some in the Corinthian community most probably had their doubts.⁸⁹

In the second section of 1 Corinthians 15 (vv. 12-28) Paul stresses a close connection between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the believers. And that denial of one is as good as denial of the other.⁹⁰ He puts forth the logical question: “Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead.” This statement is well reconstructed in the words of Lambrecht thus:

⁸⁷R. F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, 533.

⁸⁸Gordon Fee, *First Corinthians*, 718.

⁸⁹J. Lambrecht, “*Line of Thought in 1 Cor 15, 1-11*” (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994) 650.

⁹⁰Reaume John, *Another Look at 1 Corinthians 15:29 “Baptized for the Dead,”* 207.

If Christ is risen (protasis), there is, of course, a resurrection of the dead (apodosis). This implication consisting of an antecedent and a consequent, functions as the ‘minor’ of Paul’s argumentation, which is left uncompleted but can easily be completed since the content of the protasis, the resurrection Christ, has been substantiated in vv. 1-11. So, we are allowed to supply Paul’s reasoning with the ‘minor’: Indeed Christ is risen. The conclusion can now be drawn: Thus, there is a resurrection of the dead... Paul sees Christ resurrection as the basis for that of Christians. His argumentation does not start with a formal rule of logic: if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.⁹¹

He further tells them that if Christ is not raised then Paul’s preaching and the faith of Corinthians is in vain (v.14). In other words he, Paul is telling them that a denial of the resurrection of believers is a denial of everything he has preached to them and everything they have believed.

Conclusion

The reading of 1 Corinthians in the historical context has shown that The rite of using water for purification was not entirely new in the Greco-Roman world as there was a widespread of acts of purification such as ablution and immersing of self in the water by the Qumran community and proselyte immersion among the Jews. Apparently, the awareness of these practices must have made the introduction John’s baptism to find acceptance.

There were issues on ground that triggered the writing of the first letter to the Corinthians. The city of Corinth was a nerve of commerce which consequently experienced population pressure. This climate paved way for so many different religious groups and cultures with various and varied teachings and practices. Some of them did not believe in the teaching of the resurrection of the dead which is bedrock to the gospel. The apostle reacted to this situation by refuting their claims and the same time

⁹¹J. Lambrecht, “*Line of Thought in 1 Cor 15, 1-11,*” 650.

substantiating that the resurrection of the dead is a reality and the teaching is in line with the Christian faith and belief. Therefore, the idea of non-resurrection results in futility of the gospel and the efforts of those advancing it. Also, the apostle Paul employed the usage of baptism in a symbolic form to denote the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. He as well in other passages made use of the word in a literal sense.

CHAPTER 4
EXEGESES OF 1 CORINTHIANS 15:29

Literary Context

The Genre: The Letter to the Corinthians was reactive. That means that there was a situation on ground that triggered the writing of the letter. The apostle Paul was reacting to a particular situation in the Corinthian church. In a sense it was not a proactive or an intentional letter. The discernment of the genre in any work of this nature is of a vital importance because genre forms a close link to the meaning of the passage in question. As Michael Hull points out, “Indeed, the discernment of genre is the initial stage in the reading of texts and integral to the interpretative process.”¹

The Genre

The understanding of the genre is very crucial in the reading of any given text because it is closely linked to meaning and interpretative process of the passage. There is a common understanding among scholars concerning the genre of the book of 1 Corinthians to be a letter. However, Hull Michael points out that, “recently certain scholars have examined New Testament letters from a rhetorical perspective. In so doing they have challenged the assumption held for centuries about the bodies of these letters. Here we describe the character of the Hellenistic letter, consider the challenges of

¹Hull Michael, *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor. 15: 29): An Act of Faith in the Resurrection*, 51.

rhetorical criticism, and examine the nature of the ‘letter-essay’ 1 Corinthians is a letter about that there is no dispute.”²

The Structure of 1 Corinthians

The church in Corinth comprises of mostly Gentile believers who were faced with the challenge of having influence of the pagan society.³ Thus, the first part of the letter deals with a report from the house of Chloe and the second has to do with the questions raised by the Corinthians concerning doctrines (see chapters 1-6 and 7-16) respectively. Paul addressed these issues by writing to them where he introduced himself at the beginning as the custom in their days requires. He further authenticated his ecclesiastical position as an apostle called by Jesus Christ.⁴ He greeted them and made an appeal to them to live in peace and shun the spirit of division, and also encouraged them to be humble by embracing the wisdom of God not of this world by focusing on Jesus who is the basis of their call. He pointed out the consequences of their actions (chapters 1-4). He discussed the issue of moral disorder which was gaining ground in the church. These were the sin of incest and Law suit in which he instructed them not to keep company with such ones and settle disputes in the church (chapters 5-6).

He progressed to the issue of marriage and food sacrificed to idols in which he encouraged moral purity and discouraged divorce and charged them to shun any attitude that will dampen the faith of others by sinful indulgence. Also he gave them regulations

²Hull Michael, *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor. 15: 29): An Act of Faith in the Resurrection*, 139.

³Tom Udoh and Sampson Nwaomah, *Paul: His ministry and Writings*, 137.

⁴Leyland Ryken & Philip Graham Ryken *The Literary Study Bible English Standard Version* (Wheaton, U.S.A: Cross way Books 2007), 1697.

for the right and acceptable attitude in worship: the veiling of the women during worship, the Lord's Supper and the use of spiritual gifts during worship (chapters 7-14). The last two chapters concern the assurance of resurrection of the dead and the consequences of denying that, and the collection of the saints for the relief of the brethren in Jerusalem.

Lexical and Syntactical Study

Even though the main focus of this paper is the idea of being “baptized for the dead.” the passage needs to be studied in its real context. It is worthy of note that 1 Cor. 15: 29 is just part of Paul's argument on the reality of the bodily resurrection of the dead believers. The varied approaches to the interpretation of the text could be attributed to the key issues regarding such terms as “οἱ βαπτίζομενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν; εἰ ὅλως νεκροὶ” and the function of the preposition “ὑπὲρ” in the passage. The question is who *οἱ βαπτίζομενοι* are. The two basic suggestions proffered by Gene Brooks are: First, it is used metaphorically to denote Paul's sufferings or martyrdom for the gospel. Second, it is a literal Christian baptism.⁵ Considering the first suggestion, this may not be true as the author did not ever use this term in a metaphorical sense elsewhere in his literature.

The third person present tense form of the verb *βαπτίζονται* carries the suggestion that this activity was ongoing currently and that the whole church was aware of it. Further, Paul uses the second person plural when dealing with issues involving the whole church; therefore, one of the church factions was likely pursuing this activity and not the whole congregation.⁶

⁵Gene G. Brooks, “‘Baptized for the Dead,’ A study of 1 Cor 15:29” (An Exegesis Paper South Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 17.

⁶John Reume, Another Look at 1 Cor. 15: 29 “Baptized for the Dead,” 54.

τῶν νεκρῶν Consistent Pauline usage throughout chapter 15 indicates that these dead ones are literally, not spiritually dead. They are corpses, not unbelievers. With τῶν νεκρῶν, Paul uses an articular construction distinguishing a class of persons (generic use),⁷ specifically dead believers, while using an anarthrous νεκροὶ to refer to all physically dead in non-differentiated general terms.⁸

ὑπὲρ. The understanding of the function of this preposition in this text will help in understanding it. The preposition ὑπὲρ with the genitive is used in the NT in terms of benefaction (for the benefit of, for – 1 Tim 2:1), substitution (in place of in a vicarious sense – Phi 3; John 11:50; 2 Cor 5:14-15; Gal 3:13), reason (because -- Rom 15:9), reference (in reference to, concerning, with respect to – 2 Cor 8:23; John 1:30), and comparison (greater than – Matt 10:24).⁹ Also Bauer suggests the following definitions for ὑπὲρ with the genitive:

- a. for, in behalf of, for the sake of someone or something
 - i. after words that express a request, prayer, etc.
 - ii. after words and expressions that denote working, caring, concerning oneself about
 - iii. after expressions having to do with sacrifice
 - iv. after expressions of suffering, dying, devoting oneself
- b. with genitive of the thing, in which case it must be variously translated
- c. in place of, instead of, in the name of

⁷Richard A Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 56.

⁸Ibid., 68.

⁹ibid., 101, 102.

d. because of, for the sake of, for, to denote the moving cause or the reason with verbs of suffering, giving the reason for it; likewise with nouns that denote suffering

e. above and beyond what? is possible in Phil 2:13

f. about, concerning.¹⁰

The structure above briefly demonstrates the usage of the preposition “*huper*” depending on the context.

The Structure of 1 Corinthians 15

The fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians deals with the discourse of Apostle Paul in establishing the reality of the resurrection. As noted by Michael Hull, the chapter is usually divided into five general units:¹¹ verses 1-11, 12-28, 29-34, 35-49, and 50-58. The reason for this division is clearly seen in the text. First, in vv. 1-11, Paul makes a complete shift in subject matter from the preceding chapters that deal with spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 15:1 we see the introduction of Christ’s resurrection and a specific statement is made to its authenticity. Second, in verses 12-18 an expansion upon the attestation to the resurrection of Christ is introduced with the use of a rhetorical question into the chapter: “Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?” Third, in verses 29-34, Paul introduces another rhetorical question: “Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf?” Fourth, in v. 35, Paul introduces yet another rhetorical question: “But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised?’” This question is parallel to the first question in

¹⁰Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 838-9.

¹¹Michael Hull, *Baptized on the Account of the Dead*, 84.

verse 12. Verses 12-28 have to do with the fact that Christ has been raised and therefore, Christians will be raised; vv. 35-49 explain how such resurrection is possible. And finally, verses 50-58 says, “I tell you this, brethren, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” These verses authenticate the reality of resurrection and how it will happen in terms of mystery. The chiasmic structure below gives an insight to the passage at a glance.

A the presentation of Christ’s bodily resurrection on the authority of the witnesses (vv. 1-11)

B an explanation that Christ’s resurrection ensures Christians resurrection (vv. 12-28)

C behavior in accord with the resurrection (vv. 29-34)

B` an explanation of how bodily resurrection is feasible (vv. 35-49)

A` the presentation of bodily resurrection on the authority of “mystery” (vv. 50-58).

Every thought that is expressed in a chiasmic structure, it is aimed at emphasizing one thing over another.¹² Hull further buttresses this point thus: “Strictly speaking, a parallelism emphasizes a notion by repetition, whether that repetition be direct, inverted, or antithetical. Chiasmus is a particular configuration of parallelism, a subspecies that not only repeats for emphasis but repeats around an axial notion.”¹³ Moreover, J. Breck

¹²Nils W. Lund, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians (chap 7)*, in *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in the Form and Function of Chiastic Structures* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 145.

¹³Michael Hull John, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 85.

points out that, “Authentic chiasmus produces balanced statements, in direct, inverted, or antithetical parallelism, constructed symmetrically about a central idea.”¹⁴

An examination of the structure of chapter 15 shows that vv. 29-34 stand in the middle of the chapter. And as mentioned earlier, the authenticity of Jesus bodily resurrection (1-11) parallels the authenticity of believers’ resurrection (vv. 50-58). It is worthy of note that vv. 1-11 refers to a past event, and A` (vv. 50-58) refers to a future event. And B (vv. 12-28) has to do with proofs in support of A, and B` (vv. 35-49) is series of proofs to A`. Looking at C (vv. 29-34), it appears to be out of place; it does not parallel A or B. It is neither a series of proof nor a reference to past or future as seen in the other items, but a reference to an event that was already taking place among the Corinthians and in the life of Paul. Also, B deals with “some of you” (τινες) and B` deals with “someone” (τις). C mentions another group “those being baptized” (οι βαπτιζόμενοι) and Paul himself.

The Structure of 1 Corinthians 15:29

Ἐπεὶ τί ποιήσουσιν

οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι
ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν;
εἰ νεκροὶ οὐκ ὅλως ἐγείρονται,
καὶ
τί βαπτίζονται
ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν;

The structure is designed in such a way that it favors the problem the research is attempting to solve. The major area of concern which is the thrust of the research is based

¹⁴J. Breck, “*A Biblical Chiasmus: Exploring Structure for Meaning*” (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994), 71.

on the understanding of the words baptism and the dead in the context. Also the syntactical aspect which has to do with the usage of the phrase “for the dead” is considered. It is worthy of note that the guidelines stipulated by Gordon Fee on making a comprehensive structure such as making the sentence flow, starting the structure with subject followed by predicate nominative, finding a proper coordination etc., are followed.

The text consists of three sentences. The first sentence begins with a transitional conjunction “Ἐπεὶ” that introduces a new unit of thought and also coordinating the passage with the previous one. The first sentence, the main clause, Ἐπεὶ τί ποιήσουσιν is a rhetorical question that introduces the thought in the passage. οἱ βαπτίζομενοι is a participle and the subject in the passage. ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν is a prepositional phrase that contains the object and at the same time modifying the subject, οἱ βαπτίζομενοι. εἰ ὅλως νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται functions as a conditional clause, *protasis*. καὶ functions not as a transitional conjunction but as coordinating the two conditional clauses, the *protasis* which describes the cause and *apodosis*, the antecedent to the *protasis* that describes the effect.

The Morphology and Syntax of 1 Corinthians 15:29

This aspect of this research is aimed at looking at each of the terms and their various nuances and usages in other passages by the author of the book of Corinthians, Paul and other authors as well. Three words that seem to be problematic will be dealt with: βαπτίζομενοι, νεκροὶ and ὑπὲρ.

The Morphology of 1 Corinthians 15:29

Morphology is a study and description of word formation. The majority of the interpretation of the passage in question is hinged on the words βαπτίζόμενοι, νεκροὶ and ὑπὲρ. Therefore, an examination of each of this is of a vital importance.

οἱ βαπτίζόμενοι. The word baptism finds its root in the Greek word βαπτίζω. It is an extension (active form) of the word βαπτω which carries the idea of dipping in or dipping under. However, this usage is not limited to person or object but in general sense as it is used in classical writings in the sense of dipping an object into a chemically prepared liquid e.g. dying of clothes. As time progressed, the application of this word was also extended to describing a condition of a sinking ship into the waters or to sink an object into mud.¹⁵

In the *Koine* Greek period, the usage of the word βαπτίζω continued with both the literal (active) and figurative (passive) meanings, with the active sense of “to immerse” becoming especially prevalent. In a few cases the literal meaning was applied to the sacred washings of the mystery religions. However, the figurative sense continued as βαπτίζω which is used to refer to “going under” with respect to sleep or intoxication and “perishing.”¹⁶

The word is used in the New Testament both in the literal and figurative sense. The word βαπτω is used in the New Testament in literal sense only in three passages (Luke 16:24; John 13: 26 and Rev 19:23); “to dip in” and “to dye.” Also, in Matthew 7:4

¹⁵T. J. Conant, *The Meaning and Use of Baptizein* (London: Trubner & co., 1868), 5.

¹⁶ G. R. Beasley-Murray, “βαπτίζω” *International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 144.

and Luke 11:38, βαπτίζω, the active form of βαπτω is used in the literal sense to describe the Jewish act of cleansing by engaging in some washing of the body or some parts of it. However, it is worthy of note that the performance of the rite of baptism is not limited to the usages mentioned in the above passages. For instance, there are other occurrences of the word in the literal sense in other New Testament passages besides the aforementioned which includes but not limited to the following passages (Matt 3:6, 11, 13, 14 & 16; Acts 2:38, 41). There are also other occurrences such as in Mark 10:38 where Jesus described his own death in a figurative term by employing the word baptism. In Mark 7:4 the term βάπτισμος, is used to refer to the ceremonial washing of inanimate objects such as clothes, hands, cups pitchers and pots.

There are other related terms that described the rite of cleansing similar to baptism that were employed to describe the activity according to its nature. These terms include; lou,w apolou,w loutro,n wash, wash away, and bath or washing respectively.¹⁷ Another word that is close to lou,w ((wash) in meaning is νίπτω (wash), however, there exist a contrast in that the former has to do with the entire washing of the whole body while the latter is used within the confine of washing some parts of the body.¹⁸ In the LXX (Isa 21:4) (Check its usage in the LXX to be sure of your point) it is used in the metaphorical sense to denote an overwhelming condition of an individual being soak with wine (baptized with wine), being in a profound state of sleep (baptized with sleep), being in an unredeemable condition of debt or being immersed in a deluge of debts (baptized

¹⁷Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1975), 150.

¹⁸Ibid.

with debt) or facing an insurmountable state of misery (being baptized with misery).¹⁹

The usage of the term βάπτισμα which is common in the New Testament is rarely found in the literatures that existed before the New Testament era. It is speculated that the reason could be traceable to the New Testament authors style of writing in trying to delineate between Greek and Jewish purification rites.²⁰ Further, Colin Brown categorically states that,

Baptisma appears for the first time in the NT [New Testament]. No instance of its occurrence in pagan and Jewish literature has yet been found. In view of the fact that its earliest employment is for the baptism of John, it could conceivably have been coined by John's disciples. More plausibly, it is a Christian innovation, and was applied by Christian writers to John's baptism in the conviction that the later should be bracketed with Christianity rather than with Judaism.²¹ (Parenthesis mine).

Also, the term, βάπτισμος, dipping, immersion appears in the classical literature to connote the idea of perishing. This usage is in the metaphorical sense as well.

T. J. Conant described the usage of the word by Polybius as it relates to an iron-headed spear that was constructed in the ancient time in such a way that when it falls into a river or water it does not completely get sunk or immersed (baptized) the remaining part is buoyed up so that it can be easily seen and recovered.²² Further, the passage of the military men (Roman Army), foot soldiers under the Roman consul Tiberius the

¹⁹Keith Crim ed., et al., *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Nashville, Tennessee: Parthenon Press, 1976), 86; Walter A. Elwell ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 50.

²⁰Keith Crim ed., et al., *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, 86.

²¹Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 149, 150.

²²Conant, *The Meaning and Use of Baptizein*, 5.

successor of Augustus Caesar through a river that was over flooded is described as baptism.²³ Also, speaking about two rivers in Asia Minor and a channel in which they forcefully pushed their current through T. J. Conant states that, “And to one who hurls down a dart, from above into the channel, the force of the water makes so much resistance, that it is hardly immersed (baptized).”²⁴ The usage of the word baptism was also employed by Josephus the prolific Jewish historian in describing the gruesome murder of a boy, Aristobulus who was drowned in a swimming bath; he was continually forcefully plunged under the water and was eventually suffocated to death.²⁵ He further gives an account in one of his works about the condition of a ship in the port of Joppa during a storm thus: “And many (of the vessels), struggling against the opposing swell towards the open sea (for they feared the shore being rocky and the enemies upon it) the billow, rising above, submerged (baptized).”²⁶ Also, in narrating Jonah’s flight and the event that followed he points out that, “The ship being just about to be submerged (baptized).”²⁷ In describing his personal experience, Josephus states “For our vessel having been submerged (baptized) in the midst of Adriatic, being about six hundred in number, we swam through the whole night.”²⁸ In presenting the picture of a man who destroyed his beast by burning after dipping it in oil, Conant, says, “A certain man,

²³Conant, *The Meaning and Use of Baptizein*, 5.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Josephus Flavius, *Jewish Antiquities*, 15.3.3.

²⁶Josephus Flavius, *Jewish War*, 3.9.3.

²⁷Josephus Flavius, *Jewish Antiquities*, 9.10.2.

²⁸Josephus Flavius, *Jewish War* 2.7.2.

having a grudge against a fox for some mischief done by her, after getting her into his power contrived a long time how to punish her; and dipping (baptizing) her in oil, he bound it to her tail and set fire on it.”²⁹

In describing the drinking attitude of the army of Alexander the Great when returning from one of their conquests , Plutarch states, “Thou wouldest not have seen a buckler, or a helmet, or a pike; but the soldiers, along the whole way, dipping (baptizing) with cups, and horns, and goblets, from great wine-jars and mixing-bowls were drinking to one another.”³⁰ In comparing the curing pattern employed by Christ to those affected by the human acts by the use of knife and other sharp objects, Chrysostom used baptism to describe the piercing of human skin with a steel.³¹ He further describes this experience of plunging a metal into the skin when he was commenting on the experience of David and Goliath thus: “Even this was worthy indeed of praise and greatest admiration that he did not plunge in (baptize) the sword, nor severe that hostile head.”³² Josephus also commented in this regard as he described the suicide done by a certain man called Simon: “And stretching out the right hand, so as to be unseen by none, he plunged (baptized) the whole sword into his own neck.”³³

In the fables of the ancient people the usage of the word “baptism” was also prevalent. Conant quoted a fable of the shepherd who sold his flock and obtained

²⁹Conant, *The Meaning and Use of Baptizein*, 42.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 11.

³¹*Ibid.*, 21.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Conant, *The Meaning and Use of Baptizein*, 33.

merchandise and travelled by the sea by stating that, “But a violent storm coming on, and the ship being in danger of becoming immersed (baptized) he threw out all the lading into the sea and with difficulty escaped in the empty ship.”³⁴In another fable of the mule he stated that “One of the salt-bearing mules, rushing into a river, accidentally slipped down and rising up lightened (the salt becoming dissolved) he perceived the cause and remembered it; so that always, when passing through the river, he purposely lowered down and immersed (baptized) the panniers.”³⁵

The usage of the word “baptism” was also in some instances employed in a metaphorical sense.

The usage of the word “βαπτίζω” in Pauline Epistles. Baptism actually played a vital role in the work of the apostles. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul describes it a symbol of burial and resurrection with Christ Jesus (Rom 6: 3-11). In Galatians, he portrayed baptism as an act of putting on Christ. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, did put on Christ (Gal 3:27). However, there is a rare occurrence of the verb βαπτίζω in Paul’s letter outside 1 Corinthians. Besides its ten occurrences in 1 Corinthians, Paul uses βαπτίζω in Romans 6:3 up to two times and in Galatians 3:27. Apart from the two appearances of the word βαπτίζω in 15:29, it also appears eight times in 1 Corinthians (1:13, 14, 15, 16 [2x], 17; 10:2; and 12:13). John Reuame states that, “Paul consistently used this term with the literal sense of the Christian initiatory rite.”³⁶

³⁴Conant, *The Meaning and Use of Baptizein*, 25.

³⁵Ibid., 24.

³⁶John D. Reaume, “Another Look at 1 Corinthians 15:29 “Baptized for the Dead.” 469.

However, he further observes that, there are three instances in which Paul used the word in a nonstandard way with reference to a believer being identified with Christ in His death (Rom 6:3), the Israelites being identified with Moses and believers being immersed by the spirit of God (1 Cor 12:13).³⁷ According to some, the word “baptize” was used in the literal (active) sense of “to suffer shipwreck,” “to perish” or “to drown.” In the Septuagint, the word occurs only four times and both the literal and figurative senses are present (cf. Lev 6:28; Isa 21:4). In the *Koine* Greek period, the usage of the word βαπτίζω continued with both the literal (active) and figurative (passive) meanings, with the active sense of “to immerse” becoming especially prevalent. In a few cases the literal meaning was applied to the sacred washings of the mystery religions. However, the figurative sense continued as βαπτίζω which is used to refer to “going under” with respect to sleep or intoxication and “perishing.”³⁸

In the LXX and the New Testament, βαπτισμα and βαπτίζω are always used literally³⁹ except for their use in Mark 10 and Luke 12 in a figurative sense. Despite the fact that the usage of the word is in the figurative sense in some cases, as mentioned earlier, but the balance in this context seems to hang in favor of a literal reading.

τῶν νεκρῶν. We now turn to the word νεκροὶ which does not only appear in the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians but also in some of his written work as contained in the book of Romans. Romans chapter 8 speaks of the death of sin apart from the law, and

³⁷John D. Reaume, “Another Look at 1 Corinthians 15:29 “Baptized for the Dead.” 469.

³⁸G. R. Beasley-Murray, “βαπτίζω” *International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 144.

³⁹Michael Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 96.

Romans 6:11, 13 and 8:10 talks about union in Christ's death in baptism. It appears ninety times in the LXX and 128 times in the New Testament. In the Pauline work it appears thirty four times and in most cases it appears in Romans and 1 Corinthians. Its appearances are scattered throughout the book of Romans (1:4; 4:17, 24; 6:4, 9, 11, 13; 7:4, 8; 8:10, 11(2x); 10:7, 9; 11:15; 14:9). In 1 Corinthians, we find νεκροὶ used only in chapter 15. Besides its two instances in 15:29, it's found in vv. 12 (2x), 13, 15, 16, 20, 21, 32, 42, 45, and 52. Elsewhere, Paul uses the word in 2 Corinthians 1:9; Galatians 1:1; Philippians 3:11; 1 Thessalonians. 1:10; and 4:1. In this vein, considering that throughout Paul's letters and especially 1 Corinthians, he is consistent in using it, νεκροὶ in the literal sense.

In the New Testament, νεκροὶ is used much more in its literal sense than figurative sense. And when it is used as a noun, νεκροὶ simply means "the dead as distinct from the living. The few instances that it is used in the figurative sense appear in Matt 8:22 and Luke 9:60 where Jesus speaks about "the dead burying their dead." And in John 5:25 Jesus speaks of the time when "the dead will hear the voice of the son of God and those who hear will live." In Ephesians 5:14 we find the quotation: "Awake O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." Since Paul consistently uses νεκροὶ in the literal sense rather than figurative throughout 1 Corinthians 15 and since the literal sense is more preponderance in verse 29, it appears a literal understanding of the term νεκροὶ as referring to dead individuals may be proper.

Another question that comes to mind is who are the τῶν νεκρῶν? Was Paul referring to the dead believers, unbelievers or Catechumens who died before being baptized? To attempt these questions we have to turn to the grammatical construction of

the passage. The articular construction of τῶν νεκρῶν refers to a specific group of dead individuals, with the anathrous noun νεκροὶ referring to the dead in general.⁴⁰ The context of the passage supports this fact as we can see Paul distinguishing between the dead in general (vv. 12, 13, 15, 16, 20, 21, and 29b) and Christians who had died (vv. 29a, 35, 42, and 52).⁴¹

ὕπερ. The preposition ὑπερ is another key element in the proper understanding of the passage in question due to the controversy it has generated. ὑπερ a preposition which may take the accusative or the genitive case, appeared 430 times in the Old Testament (LXT). It appeared 150 times in the New Testament; 112 of those appearances are in Paul's letters. The usage of this preposition by Paul is more frequent than any other New Testament author.⁴² When it is used with the accusative, ὑπερ means "over" or "above." However, when it is used with genitive it carries the meaning of "on behalf of" which emphasizes a representation (e.g. Eph 5:2, 25; 1Thess 5:10; Titus 2:14), or "instead of" emphasizing substitution (e.g. John 11:50; 2Cor 5:14-15; Gal 3:13; Phi 13).⁴³ In other words, the preposition is used to express a favor or an advantage that is accruable to another person. On this ground, some commentators view the phrase ὑπερ τῶν νεκρῶν as

⁴⁰Blass, F. and Debrunner, A. De. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 133.

⁴¹Jeremias, "Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God," 155.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

suggesting a practice of vicarious baptism in which a person was physically baptized for the benefit of another individual.⁴⁴

This Greek preposition usually stands before either the accusative or genitive based on its usage in the context to express the idea of state and rest or of motion over and beyond a place.⁴⁵ Thayer points out that the preposition can be translated as over, above, beyond, across when describing a position or a situation. But in this sense it does not occur in the New Testament.⁴⁶ However, it has an innate tendency of signification derived from its original meaning when joined with other classes of words:

ὑπερβαλλόντως, ὑπεραίρομαι, ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ, ὑπερέκεινα, ὑπερεκτείνω etc. It is used to show an act done for one's safety advantage or benefit. For instance, προσεύχεσθε ὑπὲρ τῶν ... (Matt 5:44; Luke 6:28); εὐχέσθε ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων (James 5:16); δεήθητε ὑμεῖς ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ (Acts 8:24); δέησις πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν εἰς σωτηρίαν (Rom 10:1) συνυπουργούντων καὶ ὑμῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν (2 Cor 1:11); δεήσει ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν (2 Cor 9:14) δεήσει μου ὑπὲρ πάντων ὑμῶν (Phil 1:4); καὶ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ (Eph 6:19); προσευχαῖς ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ πρὸς τὸν θεόν (Rom 15:30); προσευχὰς ἐντεύξεις εὐχαριστίας ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀνθρώπων (1 Tim 2:1); to be on one's side, to favor and further one's cause (Mark 9:40; Luke 9:50; Rom 8:31). Expressed in a way to show an act for one's advantage as demonstrated in the following passages: ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ φρονεῖν (Phi 4:10); ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ

⁴⁴Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians, Hermeneia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 227; Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 187; Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 764.

⁴⁵Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, International Bible Translators* (1998-2000), 638.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

ἁγίων (Rom 8:27); ἐντυγχάνειν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν (Heb 7:25); ἀλλὰ τὸ αὐτὸ ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων (1 Cor 12:25); ἀγρυπνοῦσιν ὑπὲρ τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν (Heb 13:17); ἀγωνιζόμενος ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν (Col 4:12); ζῆλον ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ (2 Cor 7:7); πιστὸς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν (Col 1:7); To offer offering for someone or to enter into the heavenly sanctuary for the saints as used in the case of Christ ministry: προσηνέχθη ὑπὲρ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου αὐτῶν ἢ προσφορά (Acts 21:26); πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν εἰσηλθεν Ἰησοῦς (Heb 6:20); After the idea of suffering, giving up life: ἐκδαπανηθήσομαι ὑπὲρ τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν (2 Cor 12:15). See also, Romans 9:3; 16:4; 2 Corinthians 12:15. Christ dying to obtain salvation for man: τὴν ψυχὴν μου τίθημι ὑπὲρ (John 10:15; 3:16; 15:13). After expressions relating to sacrifice for, to atone for someone; Christ is said to have poured his blood for ... τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ ἐκχυννόμενον ὑπὲρ πολλῶν (Mark 14:24); to pay the price for something (Heb 10:12). Christ underwent death for man's salvation, Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀπέθανεν (Rom 5:6, 8; 14:15; 1 Thess 5:10). God gave up His son for ..., ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πάντων παρέδωκεν αὐτόν (Rom 8:32); παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ (Gal 2:20). All the passages above demonstrate the usage of the preposition as it relates to an act that is done for one's advantage. And in most cases what is done for one's advantage is not real without the person being acted for. In a sense it has to be done in his stead.⁴⁷

Thus, we now turn to the usage of the preposition with a component of representation or substitution "in the place of," "in the name of" and "instead of." The preposition *anti* is in most cases used to express either "in the place of" or "instead of." Thus, the two prepositions *ὑπὲρ* and *anti* are employed in the work of Irenaeus interchangeably (adv.

⁴⁷Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 638.

Haer. 5, 1).⁴⁸ ἵνα ὑπὲρ σοῦ μοι διακονῆ (Phm 1:13). In expressions concerning the death of Christ: εἷς ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Anything of an active or passive sense that is undertaken on behalf of a person or thing is undertaken ‘on account of’ that person or thing ὑπὲρ is used of the impelling or moving cause.⁴⁹ To procure life for mankind (John 6:51); to do or suffer anything, ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἀτιμασθῆναι (Acts 5: 41; 9:16; 15:26; 21:13; Rom 1:5; 3 John 1:7); ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν (Phil 1:29) ὑπὲρ ἧς καὶ πάσχετε (2 Thes 1:5); With the genitive of the thing, ἀλλ’ ὑπὲρ τῆς δόξης (John 11:4); ὑπὲρ ἀληθείας θεοῦ (Rom 15:8); ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν οἰκοδομῆς (2 Cor 12:19). With a genitive of the person: ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τῇ δεήσει (2 Cor 1:11); εὐχαριστῶν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν (Eph 1:16); ἀγῶνα ἔχω ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν (Col 2:1).

Also, in some instances, it refers to the object under consideration: concerning, of, with regards to.⁵⁰ καυχῆματος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν (2 Cor 5:12); καύχησις ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν (2 Cor 7:4); ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κεκαύχημαι (2 Cor 7:14); καυχίσεως ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν (2 Cor 8:24); ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καυχῶμαι Μακεδόσιν (2 Cor 9:2) ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑπομονῆς ὑμῶν (2 Thess 1:4); μάθητε τὸ μὴ ὑπὲρ ἃ γέγραπται (1 Cor 4:6) φρονεῖν ὑπὲρ πάντων ὑμῶν (Phi 1:7); πρῶτον μὲν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀνηκόντων τῷ βασιλεῖ γνησίως φρονῶν (2 Macc 14:8). To proclaim concerning: κράζει ὑπὲρ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ (Rom 9:27); παρακαλέσαι ὑπὲρ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν (1 Thess 3:2); ὑπὲρ οὗ ἐγὼ εἶπον (John 1:30). After verbs of saying, writing etc.: τῶν Λευιτῶν ὑπὲρ τῶν σωρῶν (2Chr 31:9); ἄρχουσιν ὑπὲρ Αβεσσαλωμ (2Sam 18:5); ὑπὲρ

⁴⁸Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 638.

⁴⁹G. B. Winer, *Treatise on the Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1882), 385.

⁵⁰Alexander Buttmann, *A Grammar of the New Testament Greek* (Washington DC: Warren F. Drapper, 1891), 335.

αὐτῶν τοῖς τέκνοις (Joel 1:3); ἀπαγγέλλοντας ὑπὲρ τῶν συντετελεσμένων (Judith 15:4);
τῆν Ἰουδαίαν ὑπὲρ τῆς ἐλευθερίας (Esdr 4:49); ὑπὲρ ὧν Λυσίας(2Macc 11:35).

Concerning this, ὑπὲρ τούτου (2Cor 12:8).

When it is used with the accusative it is usually interpreted as: over, beyond, more than.⁵¹ To be above or superior to one: μαθητῆς ὑπὲρ τὸν διδάσκαλον οὐδὲ δοῦλος ὑπὲρ τὸν κύριον αὐτοῦ (Matt 10:24); μαθητῆς ὑπὲρ τὸν διδάσκαλον (Luke 6:40). The name superior to every other name, τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα (Phil 2:9). But more than a servant, ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ δοῦλον (Philm 1:16). To do exceeding abundantly above all, δυναμένῳ ὑπὲρ πάντα ποιῆσαι ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ (Eph 3:20). Above the brightness of the sun, ὑπὲρ τὴν λαμπρότητα τοῦ ἡλίου (Acts 26:13). To a greater degree, more than; Ὁ φιλῶν πατέρα ἢ μητέρα ὑπὲρ ἐμὲ (Matt 10:37). Beyond what you are able, beyond your strength, ὑπὲρ ὃ δύνασθε (1Cor 10:13). To make comparison; going beyond someone, ὑπὲρ πολλοὺς συνηλικιώτας (Gal 1:14). On the other hand when someone is reduced beyond measure, to be inferior to: ἡσώθητε ὑπὲρ τὰς λοιπὰς ἐκκλησίας (2Cor 12:13); ἐπλεόνασαν ὑπὲρ τὰς κεφαλὰς ἡμῶν (1Esdr 8:72); ἐπερίσσευσεν ὑπὲρ τοὺς βασιλεῖς (Macc 3:30); φόβος κυρίου ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὑπερέβαλεν (Sir 25:11). After comparative equivalent to 'than': τομώτερος ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν μάχαιραν δίστομον (Heb 4:12); ὑπὲρ Βαλακ υἱὸν Σεπφωρ βασιλέα Μωαβ (Judg 11:25); θάνατος ὑπὲρ ζωὴν (Sir 30:17).

The survey of the preposition “ὑπὲρ” under study in the passages above have demonstrated that: Its usage in the Septuagint (LXX), Apocryphal writings, Church fathers writings and New Testament carries the ideas of: for, over, on behalf of, above,

⁵¹G. B. Winer, *Treatise on the Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1882), 385.

concerning, beyond. It is used for describing an act that is engaged in for someone's benefit; to favor and further one's cause. It is also used to show a degree of superiority to be above someone or something as well as to less than.

The Syntax of 1 Corinthians 15:29

The aim of this section is to examine the syntactical issues in 1 Cor 15:29. Suffice it to mention that 1 Cor 15:29 is composed of three sentences, of which two are separate though closely related interrogative sentences that will be treated separately. In translating οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι (pres., pass. or mid., part., nom., masc., pl.) and βαπτίζονται (3rd per., pl., pres., pass., or mid., ind.) βαπτιζόμενοι is a simple participle that is paired with an article. οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι can be translated as “those (the ones) who are baptized,” or those (the ones) who have (get) themselves baptized.”⁵² The third person present tense form of the verb βαπτίζονται suggests that this activity was a current practice that was being carried out by a group of individuals and was probably known by the Corinthian believers.⁵³

In the passage, the adjective νεκροὶ which is the subject of ἐγείρονται (1 Cor 15:29). It functions as a substantive and means “dead persons.” Thus, the use of the term ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν can best be rendered as “for the dead persons” or “for the dead ones.” However, the second usage of the term in the passage which is without the article (*anathrous*) shows that the author had deeper a concern not on the individual but rather on its nature or quality. It is important to note that there is a distinction between the two uses of νεκροὶ in the passage. Paul here distinguishes between the dead in general and the

⁵²Michael Hull, *Baptized on Account of the Dead*, 103.

⁵³W. Mare, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:287.

dead in particular by the use of the article. The *anarthrous* use indicates the dead in general as shown in the following passages (Rom 1:14; 4:24; 6:4,9,11,13; 7:4; 8:10,11 [2x]; 10:7,9; 11:15; 14:9; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20; 2:1,5; Phi 3:11; Col 2:12,13; 2Tim 2:8; 4:1, while the presence of the article indicates a specific group (I Thess. 4:16).

Theological Implication of 1 Corinthians 15:29

The various interpretive approaches to 1 Cor. 15: 29 have created an atmosphere of varied and various theologies concerning the limits of the benefits of the dead. R. E. O. White attests that none of Paul's condition or benefits can be credited to the dead. Also, Paul disassociates himself and his team from the practice.⁵⁴ Further, Lawrence Richard points out that "Paul's mention of the practice does not suggest an endorsement. Rather he points to the Corinthians' inconsistency. How can they claim on the one hand that there is no resurrection, while anxiously practicing baptism on behalf of the dead?"⁵⁵

Brooks mentions that:

Early church father Tertullian wrote a defense of bodily resurrection against the heretic Marcion, who practiced baptism for the dead. Tertullian quotes 15:29, but his comments are not very helpful: "What, asks he [Paul], 'shall they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not?' Now, never mind that practice, (whatever it may have been)."⁵⁶

The Mormon Church subscribes and advocates the idea of "baptism for the dead."

According to F.F. Bruce:

⁵⁴R. E. O. White, "Baptism for the Dead," *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 49.

⁵⁵Lawrence O. Richards, *The Victor Bible Background Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1994), 403.

⁵⁶Gene G. Brooks, "Baptized for the Dead, A study of 1 Cor 15:29" (An Exegesis Paper South Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, November 30, 2015), 16.

The Mormon Church teaches that their members are responsible to be baptized for dead loved ones. If a person dies having never been baptized in this life, a Mormon relative can be baptized in his place. Then the person may have a chance after death to believe the gospel, repent and be saved. Seeking the dead in this manner is a Mormon's greatest responsibility.⁵⁷

The Mormon doctrine of baptism for the dead originated when Joseph Smith's older brother Alvin fell ill with bilious colic and died just after Smith began to have visitations from the angel *Moroni* in the woods. Since the Smiths were not members of any church, the pastor who conducted Alvin's funeral declared in his address that Alvin was in hell because he was not a church member. This condemnation understandably upset the Smith family, especially since Alvin was a most handsome man of great strength, "surpassed by none but Adam and Seth," according to Joseph Smith.⁵⁸ As Joseph Smith was translating the book of Mormon he discovered baptism was a requirement for eternal life. And the appearance of John the Baptist gave him the authority to baptize. Years after that Elijah appeared to him and gave him the authority to baptize even the dead. This invariably paved a way to the baptism of the dead in the Mormon Church. This idea which suggests that the dead one can still be a beneficiary of any act of salvation on his behalf is at variance with the scriptures. The Bible teaches that the dead do not know anything and have no part in any act of mercy or benevolence shown to them (Ecc 9:5).

⁵⁷F. F. Bruce, H. L. Ellison, G. C. D. Howley, *The international Bible Commentary: With the New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 1383–84.

⁵⁸Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 91.

Conclusion

The genre of the book of 1 Corinthians is letter. The structure of the book reveals that the report from the house of Chloe and questions raised by the Corinthians concerning doctrine necessitated the writing of the letter. The lexical studies shows that the use of the word ὑπὲρ is rightly translated as “for” as against “above.” It is of a vital importance to understand that the apostle was not trying to establish a new practice of baptism for the dead which was in contradiction to what was commonly held by the Church. His major focus was on the resurrection of the dead which forms the basis of the belief of Christians. Therefore, the practice of the literal baptism for the dead as practiced by some is a direct distortion of what the apostle had in mind.

CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

After a close examination and exegesis of the passage (1Cor 15:29), this research work is summarized thus:

The research proceeds in five simple steps that constitute the five chapters of this study. The first chapter of this research work concerns with the background of the study on baptism as it relates to the topic under study. The problem as stated therein; whether the phrases “baptized for the dead,” is used in the figurative or literal senses as the context of the passage suggests is captured. It further deals with the purpose of the study, an attempt to determine the contextual meaning of “for the dead” by investigating the meanings and the usages of the significant lexical items as contained in 1Cor 15:29 such as, βαπτιζόμενοι, ὑπὲρ and νεκροὶ. The study seeks to reexamine the text and the interpretative approaches and the practical application of the passage by some Christian and non-Christian bodies which seem to strengthen the idea of the immortality of soul, a teaching that is at variance with Seventh-day Adventist. The methodology is purely the application of the exegetical tools. Contextual analysis i.e. historical-literary and inter-textual as well as lexical syntactical analyses were employed.

The second chapter of the work, review of related literature explored the various and varied interpretative approaches among Bible scholars in an attempt to find a solution

to the difficulty posed by the passage. Some of these approaches posit that the apostle was referring to his daily suffering and afflictions for the sake of the spiritually dead. Other scholars see the passage as having no any literal connotation but purely literal in the sense that there was a group of people who were involved in the practice of baptizing for other believers that had passed away without having the opportunity of receiving baptism before their demise. A survey at the three major categories of baptism: Vicarious baptism, metaphorical baptism and Christian baptism is carried.

The third chapter deals on the reading of 1 Corinthians in the historical context. Here, there were practices of initiation into a new faith among the children of Israel and other nations similar to Christian baptism. For instance, proselytes entering Judaism were required to remove their former clothing and submit to the rites of circumcision and immerse themselves in water in order to gain a status of joining the ranks of Jewish community. In the Greco-Roman world there was also a widespread of the rite of ablution which. The Qumran community was also known for the observance of ritual cleansing which was believed to be similar to Christian baptism. Their lifestyle is similar to John the Baptist's and this made some to speculate that John had his origin with them. Further, the major focus of baptism in the theology of Paul in Romans 6: 1-14 is not on the literal dying of the believer but spiritual death and life in Christ.

The city of Corinth was a Roman colony, a nerve of commerce which consequently attracted population pressure. It was also a leading city in the political struggle in the Roman Empire. They were known for the worship of so many deities. Prominent among these were Poseidon, god of the sea and Aphrodite, the goddess of love

and sexuality. Associated with these were the temple prostitutes dedicated to the service of the goddess by men and women.

The Church in Corinth had some challenging issues to grapple with. These include; factional issue, spiritual issue, ethical issue and the resurrection of the dead. All these issues were exhaustively addressed by the apostle Paul.

The fourth chapter focuses on the exegeses of the passage under discussion. It first of all establishes the genre of the book of 1 Corinthians which is a reactive letter with the intent of addressing particular issues that concerns the Church in Corinth. It further looks at the structure of the entire book of First Corinthians. The first part of the letter deals with a report from the house of Chloe and the second has to do with questions raised by the Corinthians concerning doctrines.

The lexical and syntactical nature of the passage is further discussed. The usage of the Words such as βαπτίζόμενοι, ὑπὲρ and νεκροὶ and their nuances by the author and other authors in other passages are brought to view.

Conclusion

After a careful and close examination of the passage, 1Cor 15:29 this study is concluded thus:

The laudable translation of the word ὑπὲρ in the passage should be “for” as against “above” as suggested by some scholars since the word that follows it is in the genitive case and not accusative case. The expression “those who are baptized” could refer to a physical certain group of individuals who thought that the dead can benefit from any ecclesiastical activity carried out with the intent of making them to be the beneficiaries of the resurrection of the righteous dead. Also the dead as mentioned in the

passage is a reference to the physically dead. The idea that the dead and those dying is in the metaphorical sense to denote the daily suffering of the apostle Paul and his associates may not be plausible. The progression of the thought of the author does not give room to substantiate that; the author presented his discourse in the chapter by using “they” to refer to a particular group of individuals, most likely a heretical group engaged in this heretical practice, and “we” as a reference to Paul and others, a distinct group all together.

Therefore, it is very improbable that he was making any allusion to any baptism rather than the vicarious baptism. However, it is noteworthy that Paul was, in no case, trying to substantiate a practice that was not scripturally grounded.

Further there is no biblical ground justification in this passage which suggests the institution of the practice of baptism for the dead as being practiced by some religious group. This practice of baptism for the dead in the modern times is based on the misapplication and misinterpretation of the passage. The accommodation of this idea could, though not directly, pave a way to the teaching of immortality of soul since it gives room for the dead to benefit from the gesture of their living loved ones.

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