



STATEMENT DM-399

## **THE MORMON DOCTRINE OF SALVATION FOR THE DEAD: An Examination of Its Claimed Biblical Basis**

by **Luke P. Wilson**

### **Summary**

The Mormon church cites 1 Peter 3:18-20, 4:6, and 1 Corinthians 15:29 as biblical evidence, respectively, for its elaborate doctrine of salvation for the dead and the related practice of vicarious baptism for the dead. Careful study, however, shows that 1 Peter does not teach that Jesus descended into the spirit world to offer the gospel to deceased humans, but rather describes His declaration of victory to the powers of evil after His resurrection. Likewise, 1 Corinthians 15:29 does not support an apostolic practice of proxy baptism, but merely mentions an aberrant practice by some undefined fringe group at Corinth as further support for the central Christian teaching of bodily resurrection.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon church) teaches an alluring doctrine of salvation for the dead that seems to solve a theological dilemma, and appears to have at least tenuous biblical support. Many Christians are unprepared to counter this elaborate doctrine that has provided millions of Mormons with a false hope of salvation in the hereafter.

According to Mormon teaching, Jesus went to the spirit world during the time between His death and resurrection. There He appointed missionaries from among the righteous dead to preach to those who had died without the gospel or who rejected it during mortal life.<sup>1</sup> Because in the Mormon view water baptism is essential to gain eternal life, Christ also instituted proxy baptism for the dead as an ordinance of the Christian church. Mormons are baptized for their dead, non-Mormon ancestors in the belief that they will have the opportunity to accept the gospel in the spirit world, but also need this rite performed on their behalf to seal their salvation.<sup>2</sup> This ordinance can be performed only in a Mormon temple, and it is one of the main functions of temples in the Mormon system. It is considered the Latter-day Saint's solemn duty to do this "work for the dead."

It is notable that the Book of Mormon itself is silent about salvation for the dead and baptism for the dead, though it is supposed to be ancient scripture that contains "the fullness of the everlasting gospel."<sup>3</sup> Those Latter-day scriptures that do mention these subjects are largely interpretations of a handful of biblical passages, most importantly, 1 Peter 3:18-20, 4:6, and 1 Corinthians 15:29. Thus the real foundation of Mormon teaching on salvation for the dead (and the only basis for connecting it historically to apostolic Christianity) is the Mormon church's own unique interpretation of these biblical passages.

This article begins with a brief explanation and critique of the Mormon rationale for salvation for the dead. It then focuses in a more detailed manner on the interpretation of the 1 Peter passage and Christ's supposed ministry in the spirit world. (A companion sidebar article considers the mention of baptism for the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29.)

### **SOLUTION FOR A (FALSE) DILEMMA**

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In Mormonism, the doctrine of salvation for the dead functions as the solution for a (false) theological dilemma. The dilemma is that God would be unfair if He did not offer the gospel to those in the spirit world who had never heard it during their mortal lives. This dilemma arises because salvation is said to require both a specific knowledge of Jesus' atoning death and the ordinance of water baptism. Thus the Old Testament saints are said to have had a detailed knowledge of Christ's future earthly ministry and atoning death on the cross, as well as of water baptism.<sup>4</sup> In the words of Mormonism's founding prophet Joseph Smith: "The gospel has always been the same; the ordinances to fulfill its requirements, the same...therefore, as Noah was a preacher of righteousness, he must have been baptized and ordained to the priesthood by the laying on of hands, etc."<sup>5</sup>

The Book of Mormon view here is one of wholesale confusion. In fact, biblical revelation is progressive and the cognitive content of the gospel was not the same for the Old Testament saints as for those in the New Testament dispensation. Furthermore, the fate of those who die without hearing the gospel does not threaten divine justice, for such people will be judged only on the basis of the light they did have from creation and conscience (Rom. 2:12-15), though this is sufficient to render them without excuse (1:18-20). (The fate of those who die in infancy presents a different case and cannot be discussed here<sup>6</sup>).

### **CHRIST'S PROCLAMATION TO THE SPIRITS**

The Mormon church rejects the clear biblical teaching of passages such as Hebrews 9:27, Luke 16:19-31, and 2 Corinthians 6:2 that our eternal destiny is fixed at death.<sup>7</sup> It cites 1 Peter 3:18-20 as the central biblical basis for its teaching that the gospel is offered to deceased human beings in the spirit world: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah . . ." (KJV).

According to Mormon interpretation, this passage teaches that Jesus' spirit descended to Hades, the place where deceased human beings await final judgment. This journey was supposed to have taken place during the time between His death on Good Friday and His resurrection on Easter Sunday morning. The purpose of the journey was to make the gospel available both to those who had died in ignorance of it and to those who had heard but rejected it in mortality (Doctrine and Covenants 138:30-35).

Three key questions arise from this text: (1) When and where did Christ make this proclamation? (2) To whom did He make it? (3) What was the purpose and content of his proclamation? Sound answers to these questions will point up the erroneous nature of the Mormon interpretation.

#### **When and Where Did the "Preaching" Take Place?**

In considering the first question — When and where did Christ make this proclamation? — notice the sequence of events in verses 18-19: (1) Christ was *put to death*; (2) He was *made alive*; and (3) He went and *preached to the spirits* in prison. If a chronological sequence is intended here — which is the most natural way to read the passage — Christ's "preaching" to the spirits took place *after* His being made alive again. This rules out the Mormon view that this passage refers to Jesus' descent into the abode of deceased human beings during the time His body lay in the tomb.

Notice further that the text actually says nothing about a *descent*. It simply says that Christ "went" and preached to the spirits. This same word translated here as "went" (Greek: *poreuthis*) appears again in verse 22, where, speaking of Christ's ascension, it says — "Who is *gone* into heaven...." Verses 19-22 evidently describe Christ's journey back to heaven (His ascension) after His resurrection, and His proclamation to the spirits took place in the context of this journey.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Who Were the Spirits?**

This brings us to the second question: Who were the spirits to whom Christ made proclamation? They are described in verse 20 as "sometime disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah." According

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to a passage in Mormon scripture, this refers to human beings of Noah's day who refused his preaching and were destroyed in the Flood (Pearl of Great Price/Moses 7:38-39). Even if one accepts this interpretation, however, it is not useful as support for the Mormon doctrine of a general salvation for the dead. The text speaks only of a specific group — Noah's generation — not all the dead, or even all who had died in ignorance of the gospel. Furthermore, if Christ's proclamation here was an offer of the gospel, a natural question is, Why would Noah's contemporaries be singled out for an opportunity to repent in the spirit world? Arguably, they were less deserving of a second chance than others, since they had the godly example and preaching of Noah, which they ignored.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, even on Mormon terms they had not died in ignorance of the gospel (see the Mormon scripture, Pearl of Great Price/book of Moses 8:19-24, which explicitly describes how the people of Noah's day rejected his preaching). Therefore, why would they deserve or be eligible for a second chance in the spirit world?

Moreover, in his Second Epistle, Peter used the people destroyed in the Flood as an example of those being reserved for eternal punishment (2 Pet. 2:4, 5, 9). This poses a major obstacle to interpreting 1 Peter 3:19ff as an offer of the gospel to those particular inhabitants of the spirit world, since it would mean an outright contradiction between 1 Peter and 2 Peter.

There are also other reasons for rejecting the view that it was the spirits of deceased humans to whom Christ made proclamation:

- *The Bible nowhere else uses the word "spirit" (Greek: pneuma) by itself to refer merely to human beings. Angels and demons are spirits (Matt. 8:16; 10:1; 12:45; Acts 5:16; 19:12; Heb. 1:7, 14), whereas human beings have spirits (Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59).*<sup>10</sup> If Peter had wanted to say that Christ had preached to deceased humans, we would expect him to have written something like "the spirits of those which sometime were disobedient..." (as, for example, in Heb. 12:23).
- *The idea that salvation is being offered in the spirit world is out of sync with the development of Peter's argument in 1 Peter 3:17-22. The apostle's purpose is clearly to encourage suffering Christians with the example of Christ's vindication: He was put to death in the flesh but was raised up to life and victory, a victory whose extent included the realm of fallen angels (v. 22). To say that verse 19 describes the offer of the gospel to deceased humans implies that Peter veered off into an unrelated topic that does not serve this purpose (and is nowhere else mentioned in the Bible). After all, it would hardly encourage suffering Christians to know that God will give nonbelievers (including their persecutors) an opportunity to repent in the spirit world. In that case, why suffer in the flesh?*
- *Mormon apostle Bruce R. McConkie acknowledged that on the Mormon view verse 19 is an interruption of Peter's line of argument. McConkie described Peter as introducing the doctrine of salvation for the dead "in an almost casual and offhand way," and he recognizes the disjunction that results: "[Peter] is counseling the members of the Church to bear up under these unjust burdens; and he uses Christ and his suffering as the crowning illustration...Then, almost incidentally, he adds that this suffering of the Just One resulted in his death and subsequent ministry among the departed souls . . ." (emphases added).*<sup>11</sup>

The fact that the Mormon interpretation results in such a disjunction counts heavily against its validity.

### **The Powers of Darkness Defeated**

If Christ's proclamation was not made to deceased humans, then to whom was it directed? The evidence points to fallen angels. This would not have seemed unusual to Peter's original readers, for Jews and Christians at that time commonly associated fallen angels with the intense wickedness of Noah's day, for which God brought the Flood. This association was based in part on the description in Genesis 6:1-4 of "sons of God marrying daughters of men" in the period leading up to the flood. Many understood this to mean that fallen angels "left their first estate" and took human wives with whom they procreated rebellious offspring.<sup>12</sup> While Peter did not endorse the details of this interpretation, in his second epistle he did describe fallen angels imprisoned by God because of their disobedience (2 Pet. 2:4). These may be the same "spirits in prison" to whom he made reference in 1 Peter 3:19.

As noted, 1 Peter 3:22 concludes the section contained in 3:17-22 by declaring that the fallen angelic powers have been made subject to Christ. It makes sense that these spirit beings are the same as those referred to in verse 19 in light of Peter's purpose in this passage of encouraging suffering saints. The terms used for these spirit beings in verse 22 — angels (*angelon*) and authorities (*exusion*) and powers (*dunameon*) — are used elsewhere in the New Testament of the fallen angelic beings who are the enemies of God's people. For instance, in Romans 8:38-39 the apostle Paul assures Christians that "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels [*angeloi*], nor principalities, nor powers [*dunameis*]... shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (see also Eph. 6:12; Col. 2:15). How encouraging for Peter's persecuted readers (as for Christians of all ages) to know that Christ has defeated these powers of darkness!

An alternate interpretation is that the preincarnate Christ preached in the Spirit through Noah to his contemporaries.<sup>13</sup> In any case, according to this interpretation, the gospel was preached to people while they were alive, and not after they entered the spirit world.

### **What Was the Purpose of Christ's Proclamation?**

According to Hebrews 2:14-17, Jesus came to redeem human beings, not angels. Thus, if His "preaching" in 1 Peter 3:19 was to fallen angelic spirits, as the evidence suggests, it would not have been an offer of the gospel, but a declaration of His victory and their sure defeat. The particular word used here in the Greek text for "preaching," *kerusso*, supports this interpretation. It is a different word than was used in the three other places where "preaching" is mentioned in this epistle (*euangelizo* is used in 1:12, 25; 4:6). The word *kerusso* means literally "announce, make known, proclaim."<sup>14</sup> Although it is often used with reference to the preaching of the gospel, sometimes it is also used of proclamation in a general sense (Luke 12:3; Rom. 2:21; Rev. 5:2). On the other hand, *euangelizo* literally means "to bring or announce good news,"<sup>15</sup> and is always used in the New Testament in connection with God's plan of redemption. The use of the more general term *kerusso* in 3:19 is consistent with the interpretation that Christ's message was a proclamation of victory over demonic spirits, not an offer of the gospel to deceased human beings.

### **WHAT ABOUT 1 PETER 4:6?**

Doctrine and Covenants 138 is the most detailed explanation of salvation for the dead in Latter-day scripture. It assumes a direct link between Christ's proclamation to the spirits in 1 Peter 3:19 and the mention of preaching in 1 Peter 4:6: "For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are now dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."

There are, however, major differences between the "preaching" in 4:6 and Christ's proclamation to the spirits in 3:19. For instance, in 4:6 there is no mention of spirits — it simply describes those who received the preaching as "them that are dead" (Greek: *nekrois*; literally, "dead ones"). Furthermore, it does not say that *Christ* preached the gospel, only that "the gospel was preached." In fact, verse 6 can be understood only as a reference to Christ's preaching in the spirit world if we already know about such a mission from 3:19. But as we have seen, 3:19, in fact, says nothing about an evangelistic descent of Christ to the abode of disembodied human spirits.

What, then, does 1 Peter 4:6 mean? Read in context, it is essentially a footnote to 4:5. The whole argument from 4:1-5 is that God will vindicate believers who suffer for Christ and will hold their persecutors accountable on the day of judgment. Verse 5 declares that the wicked will have to "give account to him that is ready to judge the quick [alive] and the dead." The phrase "the quick and the dead" is a way of saying the whole human race throughout history.<sup>16</sup> By the statement that follows in verse 6 — "for this cause was the gospel preached even to them that are now dead" — Peter evidently means Christians who are *now* deceased, but who were alive when they heard and believed the gospel (see the NIV text of this verse).

This interpretation fits the passage's theme of comforting Christians who are suffering for Christ. But the LDS view that 1 Peter 4:6 is teaching salvation for the dead, including those who rejected the gospel in mortality (D&C 138:21-22), does not fit Peter's purpose. How would persecuted Christians be encouraged to suffer in the flesh by the knowledge that nonbelievers (including their persecutors), who have heard but rejected the gospel, will be given an opportunity to repent in the spirit world? In that case, why endure abuse for Christ in this life?

Even if it is granted for the sake of argument that 1 Peter 4:6 is an allusion to 3:19, the text still does not support a general doctrine of salvation for the dead. Note that it does *not* say, "for this cause the gospel *is* preached," but "for this cause the gospel *was* preached [past tense, completed action] to them that are now dead." Joseph Smith evidently recognized that the text of 1 Peter 4:6 as it stands is a shaky basis for salvation for the dead. The Mormon founder emended the text in his so-called "Inspired Version" of the Bible (also known as the Joseph Smith Translation, or JST) to read, "Because of this, *is* the gospel preached to them who are dead" (emphasis added).<sup>17</sup> In conclusion, there is no basis here for the idea of ongoing preaching of the gospel in the spirit world as the Mormon church teaches.

### A FAULTY INTREPRETATION

Doctrine and Covenants 138 attempts to supply a basis for the ongoing preaching of the gospel in the spirit world. It teaches that "the Lord went not *in person* among the wicked and the disobedient who had rejected the truth" (138:29, emphasis added), but rather, that he appointed messengers from among the righteous spirits, who carry the gospel to the disobedient spirits on an ongoing basis (138:30, 57). In other words, Christ Himself preached only to the righteous dead in the spirit world, but He set in motion the ongoing preaching among the disobedient dead.

Notice, however, that here Doctrine and Covenants 138 directly contradicts 1 Peter. Laying aside the question of whether the spirits to whom Christ "preached" were human or angelic, Peter clearly described them as "disobedient" (1 Pet. 3:20).<sup>18</sup> Mormon scripture is forced to contradict this basic fact in order to establish a basis for the ongoing preaching of the gospel in the spirit world.

There are also two additional reasons for concluding that the interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18ff in Doctrine and Covenants 138 is faulty:

- *The claim that righteous human spirits carry the gospel to the abode of the disobedient (human) spirits directly contradicts Jesus' teaching in Luke 16:26.* There, in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus said that it is not possible for the spirits of the righteous dead to cross over to the place of the unrighteous dead: "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot."

- *The teaching that those who reject the truth in mortality can repent in the spirit world is at odds not only with the Bible (Luke 16:19-31; Heb. 9:27) but even with other Latter-day scripture.* The Book of Mormon forcefully and repeatedly teaches that the eternal destiny of those who hear and reject the truth on earth is fixed at death: "For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors... For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his...the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked" (Alma 34:31-35; see also 2 Nephi 9:24-25, 27; Mosiah 2:36, 39).

It is clear that 1 Peter 3:18ff does not support the doctrine of salvation for the dead. The evidence indicates that it was not to human spirits but to fallen angels that Christ "preached," and His message was not an offer of salvation but a declaration of victory over those wicked spirits. The Mormon church's strained interpretation of this passage, and its rejection of the general biblical teaching that our eternal destiny is fixed at the time of death, spell failure for its claim to have restored a lost doctrine of original Christianity.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>A detailed description of the Mormon teaching on salvation for the dead is offered in Doctrine and Covenants 138:1-37, part of the canon of Latter-day scripture.

<sup>2</sup>See the official Mormon instructional manual, *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1992), 104.

<sup>3</sup>Doctrine and Covenants 35:17.

<sup>4</sup>For example, see Book of Mormon/1 Nephi 11:33-34 and 25:12-19, which are supposed to date to the sixth century before Christ. See also, Pearl of Great Price/Moses 7:55-56, which describes Enoch's detailed knowledge of Christ's

earthly ministry.

<sup>5</sup>*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976), 264.

<sup>6</sup>An article on the subject of infant salvation is available free on request from the Institute for Religious Research, 1340 Monroe Ave. N.W., Grand Rapids, MI 49505, USA, or direct e-mail to: mail@irr.org.

<sup>7</sup>Notably, so does the Book of Mormon (Alma 34:31-35; 42:4, 13, 28; Helaman 13:38).

<sup>8</sup>I do not believe that 1 Peter 3:18ff can properly be understood in connection with the doctrine of the descent of Christ's spirit into Hades during the time His body lay in the tomb, as referred to in the Apostles' Creed. None of the other passages on which the descent doctrine is based mention a redemptive purpose or activity (Acts 2:31, Rom. 10:7, Eph. 4:19-20). Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 215) is the first Christian author known to interpret 1 Peter 3:18ff as a reference to the descent. Earlier church fathers, including Irenaeus (though he discusses Christ's descent into Hades) never used this passage as support for a descent doctrine. Augustine rejected the interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18ff as redemptive preaching by Christ in Hades, and his view came to prevail thereafter. See "Descent into Hell," *New Dictionary of Theology*, Sinclair G. Ferguson and David F. Wright, eds. (InterVarsity Press, 1988), 194-95, and William J. Dalton's comprehensive study of the history of the interpretation of this passage, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits: A Study of 1 Peter 3:18-4:6* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), 16ff.

<sup>9</sup>Second Peter 2:5 describes Noah as "a preacher of righteousness."

<sup>10</sup>Peter spoke of those in the ark as "eight souls" (*psuchai*). However, while the Bible often uses the word "soul(s)" in the sense of embodied "person(s)," the word "spirit(s)" is never used this way.

<sup>11</sup>Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), 3:307.

<sup>12</sup>First Enoch, a late, nonbiblical Jewish work popular in the early Christian period, is an example of this interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4.

<sup>13</sup>Though it may seem unusual for the proclamation of a human preacher to be attributed to Christ, it is not unprecedented. For example, 1 Peter 1:11 describes the "Spirit of Christ" speaking through the Old Testament prophets. Likewise, Ephesians 2:17 speaks of Christ, "preach[ing] peace to you [Gentiles] which were afar off, and peace to them that were nigh [Jews]." This cannot mean that Jesus Himself literally preached to the Gentiles, for His ministry was limited to the Jewish people in Israel (Matt. 15:24; Rom. 15:8). Rather, His apostles, at His directive and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), carried the gospel to the Gentile world.

<sup>14</sup>Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2d rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 431.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>16</sup>J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 235.

<sup>17</sup>There is no manuscript evidence to support this textual change.

<sup>18</sup>Joseph Smith tried to resolve this conflict in his "Inspired Version" (JST) of the Bible by changing the text of 1 Peter 3:20 to read, "some of whom were disobedient in the days of Noah...." Again, however, there is no manuscript evidence to support this change.

#### **SIDEBAR:** Did Jesus Establish Baptism for the Dead?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon church) practices proxy baptism for the dead, claiming that Jesus Christ instituted this rite, and that it was part of earliest Christianity. The Mormon church points to 1 Corinthians 15:29 — the sole biblical reference to the practice — as support for this claim. The verse reads: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?" (KJV).

Even the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (a 1992 work published under the supervision of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Mormon Church<sup>1</sup>) acknowledges that this is the only biblical mention of the rite: [Paul] refers to a practice of vicarious baptism, *a practice for which we have no other evidence in the Pauline or other New Testament or early Christian writings*<sup>2</sup> (emphasis added).

Clearly in this verse the practice is merely *mentioned*, not taught. The context must be consulted for an understanding of the apostle's purpose. The theme of 1 Corinthians 15 is the centrality of bodily resurrection to the Christian gospel. The modern reader needs to keep in mind that the Hebrew-Christian doctrine of the resurrection, which we take for granted, was considered foolishness in ancient Greek culture (and Corinth was a Greek city).<sup>3</sup> Some among the Corinthian congregation evidently denied this central tenet of the faith (v. 12). Against them, Paul marshaled a series of arguments for the importance and reasonableness of the doctrine. It is important to see that his mention of baptism for the dead in verse 29 is one in this series of arguments for resurrection. It is relevant only in

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the sense that its practitioners — whoever they were — showed their hope of the resurrection of the dead by this rite.

The fact that Paul's mention of the rite is not an endorsement is signaled by the impersonal manner in which he refers to those who practice it: "Else what shall *they* do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are *they* then baptized for the dead?" (KJV; emphases added) If the practice was truly a part of apostolic teaching, we might have expected him to say, "What shall *we* do..." or "What shall *you* do..."<sup>4</sup>

Notice too that in verses 30-32 the apostle immediately contrasted the (likely Christian) fringe group practicing baptism for the dead with himself and the broader Christian community: "And why stand *we* in jeopardy every hour?...what advantageth it *me*, if the dead rise not?" (vv. 30, 32, KJV; emphases added). Indeed, Paul elsewhere in the chapter consistently addressed his readers as "you" (vv. 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 14, 17, 31, 34, 36, 51, 58), or (including himself) "we" or "us" (vv. 3, 15, 19, 30, 32, 49, 51, 52).

It is clear from Romans 9:1-3 and 10:1-4 that Paul was acutely conscious that many among his own Jewish kinsmen were outside the gospel fold. Certainly there would have been some from his own extended family who went to their graves unbaptized. *If Paul taught baptism for the dead, it is inexplicable that he would exclude himself from those who practiced the rite*, as he surely does when he writes, "What shall *they* do which are baptized for the dead..."

But would Paul use a practice of which he disapproved (baptism for the dead) to support something he wanted to affirm (resurrection)? On thoughtful study, this objection proves to have much less basis than first meets the eye:

- First, Paul has already associated the rite with a fringe group. So in this sense, it had no positive standing and needed no special refutation.
- Second, history has amply vindicated the apostle's inspired judgment. In fact, the practice of baptism for the dead never became widespread.
- Third, Paul's statement at the beginning of 1 Corinthians, "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (1:17) is a reminder that baptism does not have the same indispensable role in salvation that faith in Christ has. This is an indirect slap at the logic of baptism for the dead, which implies that baptism *is* indispensable. (We can also detect in 1:17 a clue that the Corinthian Christians may have overrated baptism, which probably helps explain the development there of this aberrant practice.)
- Fourth, Paul elsewhere used something with which he disagreed to make a theological point. In 1 Corinthians 8:10 the apostle referred to eating meat in an idol's temple without showing it to be wrong in itself; however, that he believed it is wrong is clear from what he said later in 1 Corinthians 10:23ff.

—Luke P. Wilson

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See p.79 in the March 1992 issue of *Ensign*, a monthly magazine of the LDS church.

<sup>2</sup> "Baptism for the Dead — Ancient Sources," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:97.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Acts 17:18-34 and note the reaction of Paul's audience of Greek philosophers to his mention of the resurrection.

<sup>4</sup> In an *Ensign* article on baptism for the dead ("I Have a Question," August 1987, 19), it appears that Robert L. Millet tried to shade this point by restating 1 Corinthians 15:29 and changing the pronoun "they" to "we."