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THERE IS NO 'BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD'!

A few days ago someone asked me about 1 Corinthians 15:29 and so-called "baptism for the dead". This Scripture 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?** (1 Corinthians 15:29)

As this stands in our Bibles, it seems to imply that some people were actually baptized for the dead. But **that implication is wrong**. And most of the readers of my articles, with any Church of God background, already know that this implication is wrong. But it is easy for people who do not have a Church of God background to misunderstand this verse.

So in this article we'll do two things.

First we will make clear that the Bible does not teach anything at all about being baptized for the dead. But that alone is not really enough. It's one thing to say: 1 Corinthians 15:29 doesn't mean what people think it means. But that still leaves us with an important question. And that question is: If verse 29 doesn't mean that some people were baptized for the dead, then **what does this verse actually mean?** Exactly what was Paul trying to tell his readers with this verse?

Therefore, secondly, we'll also determine exactly what verse 29 is meant to tell us. We'll be not only exposing what is wrong with the false explanation; we will also focus on the correct explanation for this verse, explaining what Paul is actually telling us in this verse.

So let's start.

BAPTISM ALWAYS HAS CONDITIONS

Solomon told us the obvious, that "the dead know not any thing" (see Ecclesiastes 9:5). The dead cannot do anything and they cannot think in any way. They have no awareness. You already know this.

When the Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost made people feel guilty for having put Jesus Christ to death, the people responded by saying to Peter: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). To this question Peter replied:

Then Peter said unto them, **Repent**, and **be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit. (Acts 2:38)

This instruction is clear. Real repentance is **an absolute requirement** for baptism. And the person involved must want to be baptized, and must therefore also personally seek baptism. **Unrepentant people must not be baptized**, though regrettably that has happened many millions of times over the past 20 centuries ... that unrepentant people were baptized.

If an individual himself or herself does not actively approach a minister of God for baptism, then nobody

else can go to the minister and say: you need to baptize that person over there. Such an approach just doesn't work. And we all understand that.

Now the dead fall into one of two categories. The dead were either repentant Christians or OT servants of God when they died, or they were unrepentant. It is either/or.

If at the time of death they had been repentant Christians (incl. OT servants of God), then they will come up in the first resurrection. And if they were unrepentant at the time of death, then they will come up either in the second resurrection or in the third resurrection, depending on certain other factors.

These destinies for all the dead are **rigidly inflexible**. The dead themselves cannot do anything to change those destinies. And neither can any living person do anything to change those destinies for people who have died.

And so: Since those who have died cannot ask anyone to baptize them, and since it is impossible for a dead person to meet the requirement for baptism (i.e. repentance), and since it is impossible for a minister to baptize a dead person, therefore **the dead cannot be baptized!**

Okay, but what about someone else being baptized **on behalf of** a dead person?

That is also not a possibility. Here's why. God tells us through the Prophet Ezekiel:

The soul that sins, it shall die. **The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son:** the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. (Ezekiel 18:20)

What God is telling us in this verse is that before God **guilt is never transferable** between human beings. No person can take over the guilt that belongs to any other person. We cannot have our guilt removed by having someone else accept that guilt on our behalf.

There is only one way that we can have our guilt removed. And that is for Jesus Christ to take that guilt from us and to accept it on our behalf. And for that to happen God requires us to first repent. But dead people cannot repent. And so **dead people cannot have their guilt removed**. Guilt can only be removed from us by this process during our lifetime. If we die with our guilt before God still in our own account, then there is no possibility for that guilt to be removed before a resurrection to physical life has taken place.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM

For people who believe in "baptism for the dead", we need to ask some questions.

Why should anyone be baptized for the dead? What is such a baptism for the dead supposed to achieve? Who can supposedly be baptized for which dead person? Must the dead person be a relative or a close friend of the living person who is offering to be baptized on behalf of the dead person? Or can anybody supposedly be baptized for anyone who has died? Could someone, for example, supposedly be baptized for Julius Caesar? Just how is who-can-be-baptized-for-whom supposed to work?

Without stating it directly, the inference of people who believe in baptism for the dead seems to be that such a baptism for the dead will supposedly remove the dead person's guilt before God, and that in this

way the dead person can then supposedly be granted salvation by God.

Yes, baptism is "for the remission of sins" (see Acts 2:38 again). But **it is not baptism that achieves the forgiveness!** Baptism only **symbolically** represents the forgiveness of past sins. The actual forgiveness of sins is always done by Almighty God. Baptism itself is incapable of removing any sins from anyone.

The proof here is that over the past 20 centuries **hundreds of millions of people have been baptized without ever having had a single one of their sins forgiven!**

Hundreds of millions of people have gone through the ritual of having been baptized ... and all they got was wet! They were not repentant, and they didn't even understand what repentance actually is. They had not met God's requirements for baptism, and they most certainly had not received God's spirit.

Baptism hadn't done anything at all for them!

There's nothing magical about baptism. Baptism is a ritual that God has enjoined on all those people who repent and unconditionally submit their lives to God. Baptism is commanded for those who seek to obey God.

But it is still only a ritual! Baptism only represents something. It represents forgiveness of past sins. But baptism itself doesn't forgive any person's sins. Only God forgives sins. And if someone is baptized without meeting God's conditions for baptism, then **such a baptism is utterly worthless.**

This is true for living people. So how much more is this true for people who have died? Dead people cannot possibly meet God's requirements for baptism. And this fact all by itself, without appealing to any other facts, means that **before God there cannot be any "baptism for the dead"**.

The idea of baptism for the dead was developed by a church that is focused on rituals. As long as people perform all the right rituals they will be accepted by God, is the underlying thinking. You can have a rotten, selfish, resentful and contentious attitude, but as long as you perform all the required rituals, you'll be okay with God.

God is supposedly much more concerned with you performing all the right rituals than He is with the little matter of your hostile attitude towards God Himself. And if you didn't sort out your hostile attitude during your lifetime, maybe someone could be baptized for you after you have died ... and you will still be okay.

It almost seems like baptism for the dead is **a way to trick God**, to get around the penalty that would otherwise be incurred by the dead. The dead person was heading for a godly punishment, and then they are suddenly yanked out of that situation ... because some living person decided to "get baptized" for that dead person.

But that's a pretty weird scenario, don't you think?

There is nothing any living person can do to change the fate of any dead person.

Right, so whatever 1 Corinthians 15:29 really means, it cannot mean that living people are to be baptized for people who have died. That is not possible.

So now let's examine this Scripture.

A CHANGE IN THE GREEK TEXT

Later we will very closely examine the Greek text of 1 Corinthians 15:29. But for now let's note that **this text was deliberately corrupted!**

By way of some brief background:

All Greek NT manuscripts are led back to two distinct areas of origin. The more accurate Greek texts go back to Antioch, which city became a major center for the nascent Christian Church outside of Jerusalem (see Acts 11:19-27; Acts 13:1; etc.). The more corrupt Greek texts of the NT, on the other hand, go back to Alexandria in Egypt.

The Antioch Greek text MSS are known as "the majority manuscripts". They are represented by the 1550 Stephanus Textus Receptus, the Byzantine Greek Text, the 1894 Scrivener's Textus Receptus, etc. They are also known as "the Received Text".

The Alexandrian Greek text MSS are known as "the minority manuscripts". They are represented primarily by the Vaticanus MS and the Sinaiticus MS. This group includes the 1881 Westcott & Hort Greek NT, the Tischendorf Greek NT, and the 1904 Nestle Greek NT.

We have some English language translations of the NT based on the texts from Antioch, and we have other more modern English translations of the NT based on the Alexandrian texts.

Now regarding our specific Scripture: just looking at the last three words in the Greek text of this verse, we have the following situation:

Majority Antioch Text reads: "... huper **ton nekron**".

Minority Alexandrian Text reads: "... huper **autou**".

So the Greek text that originally read "ton nekron" was deviously altered to read "autou". "Ton nekron" means "**the dead**", and "autou" means "**them**".

Where Paul had originally written "the dead", some Alexandrian scribe had altered that to read "them". That seems harmless enough. I mean, what's the difference between saying "the dead" and saying "them"? But this change actually has a significant impact.

We'll look at this more closely later, when we examine the complete Greek text for this verse. But for now keep in mind that **the last two words of this verse were deviously altered.**

THE CONTEXT OF VERSE 29

1 Corinthians 15 is known as "the resurrection chapter". This entire chapter deals with the resurrection. **No part of chapter 15 discusses baptism!**

In verses 1-3 Paul tells the Corinthians that he delivered the gospel to them exactly as he had received it.

Verses 4-8 discuss **the resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

Verses 9-11 speak about Paul and the apostles as the messengers who preached God's message.

Verse 12 presents the subject which Paul then discusses in the rest of this chapter.

Now if Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, **how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?** (1 Corinthians 15:12)

What is Paul going to speak about in the rest of this chapter? He is going to speak about the resurrection of the dead. Is he going to speak about baptism? No, he is going to speak about the resurrection. Which resurrection is he going to speak about ... the 1st or the 2nd or the 3rd? He is going to speak about the resurrection that applied to his audience, the 1st resurrection. He is not going to discuss the 2nd and the 3rd resurrections (except for one brief reference to the 2nd); he is going to discuss the 1st resurrection.

Verse 12 has established the subject to be discussed. And for this discussion Paul has already presented the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a point of reference, as a premise from which he will present his logical deductions.

Verses 13-15 reason from the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Verse 16 says:

For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: (1 Corinthians 15:16)

Paul is making a case against the people who deny that there will be a resurrection. Paul's logic is: if you deny that there will be a resurrection from the dead (at that time the Jewish sect of the Sadducees denied the resurrection), then Jesus Christ could not have been resurrected after His human life. In other words, those who deny a resurrection of the dead are also denying that Jesus Christ was resurrected by God the Father. That is a logical conclusion from the denial of a resurrection for the dead.

Verse 17:

And if Christ be not raised, your faith *is* vain; you are yet in your sins. (1 Corinthians 15:17)

Paul is drawing conclusions from other people's false premise that there will not be a resurrection. Now notice verse 18.

Then **they also which are fallen asleep in Christ** are perished. (1 Corinthians 15:18)

Paul has now introduced a very specific group of people. This specific group is here identified as "those who are fallen asleep in Christ". In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 Paul refers to this exact same group as "**the dead in Christ**". And 1 Thessalonians 4:16 is also speaking about the subject of the first resurrection.

Paul's concern here is for the **true Christians who had already died**. This group, converted baptized people who had already died, features very prominently in Paul's reasoning in this specific context. Together with true Christians who are still alive, the dead in Christ make up the most important group of human beings from amongst all of humanity.

In verse 19 Paul continues to reason:

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. (1 Corinthians 15:19)

Without the prospect of a resurrection life is a miserable experience, is Paul's reasoning here. This life

offers no hope for the future.

So here is what Paul has done thus far in this chapter:

- 1) He has established the fact of Christ's resurrection as a foundation.
- 2) He then presented the consequences if Jesus Christ had not been resurrected.
- 3) Now in verses 20-28 he presents an overview of God's plan for building the Family of God. This plan is based on the resurrection of Christ.

In verse 22 Paul begins to discuss the specific steps in God's plan for developing the Family of God.

For as in Adam all die, even so **in Christ shall all be made alive.** (1 Corinthians 15:22)

Speaking about all who will be made alive amounts to speaking about the resurrection of the dead.

THE WORD "ALL" IN VERSE 22

Some people misunderstand the application of the word "**all**" in this context. Here is the point:

Paul is not referring to "all" human beings! Paul is only referring to all "in Christ".

In addition to the resurrection of Jesus Christ Himself, there will be three more resurrections. The **first** resurrection is to spirit life in the Family of God. The **second** resurrection is to physical life, to then have the opportunity for salvation. The **third** resurrection is to physical life for the sole purpose of being destroyed in the lake of fire.

Of those three resurrections **only two are "in Christ"**; i.e. the first resurrection is in Christ, and the second resurrection provides the opportunity to be in Christ. To be "in Christ" is a reference to becoming a part of the Family of God.

But the third resurrection is not "in Christ"!

The purpose for the third resurrection is not to give life to anyone! The explicit purpose for the third resurrection is to achieve the permanent death and destruction of all those human beings who rejected God's offer for immortal life. This resurrection facilitates the complete blotting out of any memory that the people in this resurrection have ever existed. So it could equally well be called "**a resurrection to permanent death and anonymity**". And it does not feature in the resurrections to life.

When Paul in verse 22 refers to "in Christ shall **all** be made alive", Paul is referring to the first resurrection and the second resurrection, in addition to the resurrection of Jesus Christ Himself. But there is no room in this context for discussing or even mentioning the third resurrection.

So in verses 23-24 Paul then presents the **three** steps by which the Family of God will be built.

But every man **in his own order**: Christ the firstfruits; **afterward** they that are Christ's at His coming. **Then** the end (ones), when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. (1 Corinthians 15:23-24)

"In his own order" for what? The "order" refers to the steps by which God builds His Family. It means "every man in his own order in becoming a part of God's Family".

The starting point is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The word "afterwards" introduces step two, consisting of all those who will be in the first resurrection. The word "then" introduces step three, consisting of "the end ones" (or we might also call them "the last ones"), who are identified with the time when Jesus Christ will present the whole complete Family to God the Father.

The statement "when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God the Father" gives us a very clear time element. The Family of God will have been completed at that point in time. There will not be any further resurrections for adding individuals to God's Family. The Family will be complete.

That completion is confirmed by death being destroyed at that time (verses 25-26).

The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death. (1 Corinthians 15:26)

The elimination of death represents finality. God's purposes will have been achieved, and there will be no further need or use for death. Death represents a penalty or punishment, and from that point forward there will no longer be a need for any form of punishment for anyone.

In verses 27-28 Paul explains that when God the Father placed all things under Jesus Christ's feet, God the Father Himself is obviously excluded. And Jesus Christ Himself will freely submit to the authority of God the Father over Him.

That completes the picture Paul has presented here in chapter 15.

So what has Paul talked about? Has he talked about repentance, faith, baptism, Christian living? No, none of these things feature in this specific discussion.

Specifically, has Paul in any way throughout this discussion referred to baptism? **No!**

Next, has Paul throughout this discussion identified any specific group of people? **Yes!**

Paul has identified **one specific group of people** by two different designations. He has referred to this group as "**they who are fallen asleep in Christ**", and he has also referred to them as "**they that are Christ's**". And in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 Paul has referred to this same group as "the dead in Christ" + "we who are alive".

Next question: does any other group of people feature at any point in this discussion in chapter 15? **No!** Specifically, do any unrepentant people feature anywhere in this discussion about building the Family of God? **No!**

Unrepentant people couldn't possibly feature in any discussion of the Family of God. In such a discussion unrepentant people cannot be a consideration; they don't fit into the picture.

Now we have a clear picture regarding what Paul is speaking about. Now we come to this misleading translation of verse 29. But even without knowing a correct translation of the Greek text, it should already be abundantly clear that this verse cannot possibly mean that people should be baptized on behalf of other people who had died without being baptized themselves. That idea contradicts everything else the Bible teaches about baptism.

Now let's look at the Greek text for this verse.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:29 IN GREEK

This discussion is going to be somewhat technical. Sorry about that, but I think it is important to try to understand what the translators have done. So we will very methodically look at every Greek word in this verse.

There are 19 Greek words in this verse. Transliterated and in the same word order as in the Greek text we have:

epei ti poiesousin hoi **baptizomenoi huper ton nekron** ei holos nekroi ouk egeirontai ti kai **baptizontai huper ton nekron** (1 Corinthians 15:29, transliterated Greek text)

And here is the English AV text for this verse, with the corresponding Greek words in brackets. The English text provides the definite article "the" in one place where the definite article is not found in the Greek text. I have noted that occurrence as "(- -)", to show that there is no Greek word in the text.

Else (**epei**) what (**ti**) shall they do (**poiesousin**) which (**hoi**) are baptized (**baptizomenoi**) for (**huper**) the (**ton**) dead (**nekron**), if (**ei**) the (- -) dead (**nekroi**) rise (**egeirontai**) not (**ouk**) at all (**holos**)? why (**ti**) are they (**baptizontai**) then (**kai**) baptized (**baptizontai**) for (**huper**) the (**ton**) dead (**nekron**)? (1 Corinthians 15:29 AV)

We've already discussed that the Alexandrian Text has replaced the last two words "ton nekron" with the one word "auton". We'll ignore this change in the Alexandrian Text for now.

[Comment: The translators inserted "then" ("kai") into the middle of the translation for the verb "baptizontai", which verb means "they are baptized". So I have included the verb "baptizontai" twice in the text above, though it only appears once in the actual Greek text.]

Notice that the AV English translation has **switched the original word order** of the expression "**holos nekroi ouk egeirontai**" to the word order of "**nekroi egeirontai ouk holos**". Note specifically the changed position of the word "holos" in that four-word sequence, from being the first word to being the last word. The text that originally read "ouk egeirontai" is translated as if the text reads "ouk holos". "Ouk" is now qualifying a different word from the word it qualifies in the original Greek text.

Without having thus far considered the meanings of the Greek words, we should already be able to see that with this switch for the order of the words, the meaning of this verse has been changed from what Paul originally wrote.

Now let's look at some meanings for our Greek words.

In the English expression "the dead" the word "**dead**" is a **noun**. "The dead" is the translation for "ton nekron" in the first instance, and for "nekroi" (here the Greek does not have the article) in the second instance. Both words are forms of the Greek word "nekros". But "nekros" is not a noun! "**Nekros**" is an **adjective**; it is a descriptive word that modifies another word.

This Greek adjective is used three times in this one verse. It is used twice in the expression "**huper ton nekron**" and once in the expression "**holos nekroi**".

The Greek preposition "**huper**" is used twice in this verse with the genitive case, and in both places it is translated as "**for (the dead)**". But "huper" has a lot more meanings than just "for". For example, here is what the Greek Dictionary in the Online Bible says about "huper":

huper hoop-er'; a primary preposition; "over," i.e. (with the genitive case) of place, above, beyond, across, or causal, for the sake of, instead, regarding; with the accusative case superior to, more than: - - (+exceeding, abundantly) above, in (on) behalf of, beyond, by, + very chiefest, concerning, exceeding (above, ly), for, + very highly, more (than), of, over, on the part of, for sake of, in stead, than, to(-ward), very. (Online Bible Greek Dictionary)

And here is what Moulton says about "huper" in his work "The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament".

" ... (b) = "**concerning**," "**about**," "**as to**," a somewhat colorless use of huper, by which it is equivalent to little more than peri, for which it is often a *v.l.* in MSS. of the NT (see s.v.): ..." (Moulton Greek Dictionary)

[Comment: "v.l." stands for the Latin expression "varia lectio", meaning "alternate reading". So in NT Greek MSS "huper" is often used to mean the same as "peri".]

And here is what Robertson says about 1 Corinthians 15:29 in his work "Robertson Word Pictures of the NT":

"Which are baptized for the dead" (hoi baptizomenoi huper ton nekron). This passage **remains a puzzle**. Stanley gives **thirteen interpretations, no one of which may be correct. Over thirty have been suggested**. The Greek expositors took it to be about the dead (huper in sense of peri as often as in 2Co 1:6) since baptism is a burial and a resurrection. {Ro 6:2-6 } ..." (RWP on 1 Corinthians 15:29)

Robertson was an authority on biblical Greek. His comments make clear that he himself didn't accept that this is a reference to being baptized for the dead. When an authority of biblical Greek, like Robertson, says that for this verse there are "thirteen interpretations, no one of which may be correct", then it makes clear that **a knowledge of biblical Greek alone is not sufficient** to understand this verse correctly. That's why the KJV translators and others have in their translations changed the word order of the original text ... in attempts to find some meaning for this verse.

But they still didn't get it correct. I have looked at over 30 different translations, and not one of them has this verse correctly translated, meaning that not one of them has captured the message Paul was trying to get across to his readers.

So let's try to put the correct meaning together.

UNDERSTANDING THIS VERSE

1) "Epei" means: because, otherwise, for then, else, etc.

This first word tells us that Paul is linking verse 29 to the things he has stated in the previous 28 verses. Paul has been focused on refuting the claim that "there is no resurrection of the dead" (verse 12). He has discussed the three stages by which God will build His Family. And Paul has taken the discussion right up to the time of the new heaven and the new earth.

So with "**epei** ..." Paul is saying: "If the picture I have presented isn't true, then ...".

2) "Ti" means: what, who, why?, etc.

So with "**epei ti** ..." Paul is saying: "If the picture I have presented isn't true, then what ...".

3) "Poiesousin" means: do, make, bring, etc.

So with "**epei ti poiesousin** ..." Paul is saying: "If the picture I have presented isn't true, then what (are) they going to do ...".

We could also word this as: "If the picture I have presented isn't true, then what is going to happen to ...".

4) "Hoi baptizomenoi" means "the baptized ones". "Hoi" is the masculine plural of the definite article, meaning "the". And here "baptizomenoi" is used like **a verbal noun**, meaning that the verb "baptizo" is being used to function like a noun. And it is preceded by the definite article for "the".

We do the same in English. I can say "I walk every day", using "walk" as a verb. And I can say "The walk was really refreshing", using "walk" as a noun. This is what Paul has done in this verse, used the verb "baptizo" as a verbal noun.

So with "**epei ti poiesousin hoi baptizomenoi** ..." Paul is saying: "If the picture I have presented isn't true, then what is going to happen to the baptized ...".

5) Now we come to "huper". As we have already seen, this preposition has a range of meanings. The applicable meaning for "huper" in this context is **not "for"**, but rather something like "**concerning**".

So with "**epei ti poiesousin hoi baptizomenoi huper** ..." Paul is saying: "If the picture I have presented isn't true, then what is going to happen to the baptized concerning ...".

6) "Ton nekron" means: the dead ... (something). Keep in mind that "nekron" is an adjective and not a noun. Now because "ton nekron" is followed by the word "ei" meaning "if", therefore it does not qualify anything that follows. It must in fact qualify the noun that preceded it. Adjectives following the nouns they qualify is a common grammatical construction in biblical Greek.

So with "**epei ti poiesousin hoi baptizomenoi huper ton nekron** ..." Paul is saying: "If the picture I have presented isn't true, then what is going to happen to the baptized concerning the dead...".

Or to convert this into more readable English:

"If the picture I have presented isn't true, then what is going to happen to **the dead baptized** ...".

The Greek word for "dead" is an adjective! It modifies another word. But in the Greek text it is **not a noun** in its own right, as we falsely have it in our English translations. Translating "nekron" as a noun changed the meaning of the original text. "Nekron" is an adjective, and it should be translated as an adjective. And in the expression "the dead baptized" it is indeed an adjective.

Who are "the dead baptized"? These are the baptized people who had already died when Paul wrote this letter. They are the group Paul has already identified as "they who are fallen asleep in Christ". They are "the dead in Christ".

We have now completed the first part of verse 29. The next word means "if", and this word then introduces a whole new thought, which is built on the part we have just completed. These first eight

Greek words could stand on their own, and convey a clear thought. In practice the first eight Greek words form the platform on which the following statements are then built.

7) "Ei" means: if, whether. This conjunction is used to introduce a new thought.

So with "**epei ti poiesousin hoi baptizomenoi huper ton nekron ei ...**" Paul is saying: "If the picture I have presented isn't true, then what is going to happen to the dead baptized if ...".

Now we come to the section where **the English translators switched the sequence** of the words in the Greek text.

The English translation "**the dead rise not at all**" literally represents the Greek words "nekroi egeirontai ouk holos". But in the Greek text these four words appear in a completely different sequence. Also, the Greek text under consideration here does not contain a definite article for "dead", as I have already indicated earlier. So a correct translation for the changed word order should read "dead rise not at all", without the definite article.

The reason why the Greek text here does not contain a definite article for "nekroi" is because in the correct word order the word "nekroi" is already qualified by the Greek adverb "holos".

The correct sequence of the Greek words here reads: "holos nekroi ouk egeirontai". "**Holos**" means: completely, altogether, wholly. "**Nekroi**" is a form of "nekros", the adjective that means "dead". "**Ouk**" is a form of absolute negation, meaning: no, not. "**Egeirontai**" is a form of the verb "egeiro" and it means: to raise up from sleep or death, to rise up.

So the expression "**ei holos nekroi ouk egeirontai**" means "if all (the) dead are not raised up".

The next word "ti", which we have already seen, introduces a new expression into this statement. So the whole of verse 29 consists of three distinct expressions. The first two expressions read in Greek:

"epei ti poiesousin hoi baptizomenoi huper ton nekron ei holos nekroi ouk egeirontai".

These two expressions translate into English as follows:

"If the picture I have presented isn't true, then what is going to happen to the dead baptized, if all the dead are not raised up?"

Notice that **the corrected word order** for the Greek words **changes the meaning** from "if the dead rise not at all" to "if all the dead are not raised up". The wrong expression "if the dead rise **not at all**" has a completely different focus from the correct expression "if **all the dead** are not raised up".

The correct expression "**all the dead**" cannot possibly describe "those who are baptized for the dead", because those people would at best (and totally theoretically) constitute a somewhat minor group amongst all Christians. (In reality there is no such group.) And that is why the translators had to change the sequence of the Greek words in their English translations. They had to make the word order "fit" with their flawed translations of "baptized for the dead", without appearing to twist the intended meaning too much.

And most of the translators simply didn't understand the things I am explaining here. As the Greek scholar Robertson acknowledged, as quoted earlier, scholars argued about "13 possible different meanings for this verse". All those scholars were clueless, as to what Paul is really saying in this verse.

Paul is speaking about "**all the dead in Christ**" (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16 again). He is speaking about those dead people "**who are fallen asleep in Christ**" (verse 18), and who have "perished" if there is no resurrection. Paul is concerned with exactly the same group of people he had already identified in verse 18.

Paul is not introducing some totally new and undefined and unrecognizable group of people in this verse. No, Paul is applying his reasoning to the group of people he had already identified earlier.

So we have now correctly translated the first two parts of this verse. Now let's look at the last part.

8) The last six words read "ti kai baptizontai huper ton nekron". We've already seen the expression "**baptizontai huper ton nekron**", except that the form "baptizontai" is the present passive indicative, while the form "baptizomenoi" is the present passive participle. But both words are forms of the verb "baptizo".

So the last four words "baptizontai huper ton nekron" mean "the baptized concerning the dead", or more naturally "**the dead baptized**". This is another reference to baptized people who had already died. Again, keep in mind that in the Greek text "dead" is an adjective and not a noun.

9) That only leaves us with the words "ti kai". "Ti" we have also seen already, and it means: what, who, why.

The main meanings of "kai" are: and, also.

Now we have translated all 19 Greek words in this verse. Here is our final translation for this verse. I'll change the punctuation somewhat.

"If the picture I have presented isn't true, then what is going to happen to the dead baptized? If all the dead (i.e. in Christ) are not raised up, what about the dead baptized?"

Or we can clean it up some more and say:

"If the picture I have presented to you in the previous 28 verses isn't true, what's going to happen to the baptized people who have died? If all the dead in Christ are not resurrected, what about the baptized people who have died?" (1 Corinthians 15:29, corrected translation, somewhat amplified)

This translation repeats the expression "the baptized people who have died" because Paul has repeated the expression "baptizomenoi (or baptizontai) huper ton nekron". That group of people was the clear focus of Paul's concern.

It should now be abundantly clear that Paul was not at all speaking about anyone supposedly being "baptized for the dead". That is nothing more than a very diabolical mistranslation.

Now let's also briefly consider the alteration in the Alexandrian MSS, where the words "ton nekron" have been replaced by the one word "auton".

That devious change creates more confusion. It hides the fact that this is speaking about baptized people who have died. It has removed the adjective (i.e. "dead") that modifies baptized individuals, and instead replaced this adjective with the personal pronoun for "them". This devious change makes it more difficult to understand the correct meaning of this verse.

SOLVING A PUZZLE

Have you ever dealt with a puzzle where **you know the correct answer**, but **you just don't know the way for how to get to that correct answer**? And so you present some completely wrong reasoning, followed by the correct answer or solution.

We know the correct conclusion, and we then try to reason our way back to the beginning of the puzzle. In many cases that process is going to expose an explanation that is completely flawed. But who cares about a lack of logic, if we have the final answer correct? The final correct answer is all that matters, right?

This is something that has happened many times in God's Church in the past seven or so decades. We've had the right answer, but our process for arriving at the right answer is seriously flawed. Objective non-Church of God observers would view our reasoning in those cases as illogical. When this is the situation, when a flawed line of reasoning leads to the correct conclusion, then this always reveals that **we started out from the correct conclusion** and tried to work our way back to the original problem or question.

I mention this because that is exactly how we in God's Church have dealt with 1 Corinthians 15:29 in the past.

We in God's Church have always known that this verse cannot possibly mean that some people should be baptized on behalf of other people who have already died. That concept is absurd!

But we have in the past not really been able to work our way back to the start of this question. We've known what 1 Corinthians 15:29 does not mean. But we haven't understood what it does mean.

And therefore in the past we have simply presented some other lines of reasoning to arrive at the pre-determined correct answer. For example, we have sometimes tried to expand the statement "baptized for the dead" to supposedly mean "baptized **for the hope** of the resurrection of the dead". And to support this explanation we may have quoted Paul's statement in Acts 23:6.

And yes, the resurrection is indeed "the hope of the dead". So we can make a correct statement. **But that is not what Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 15:29!** In this verse Paul is presenting a completely different line of reasoning, as I have explained in the above discussion. And we ought to try to understand what Paul actually meant.

Right, we have now completed both aspects which we set out to examine. We've seen what 1 Corinthians 15:29 very clearly does not mean (the easy part). And we have also established what this verse does mean (the more challenging part).

Frank W Nelte