29 Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? 30 Why are we in danger every hour? 31 I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! 32 What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” 33 Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” 34 Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.  
 Paul will now conclude the argument concerning the resurrection of the dead. He will do so by appealing to certain practices, and lifestyles, that would contradict the idea that the dead are not raised. He begins by discussing an type of baptism which is infamous for being incredibly vague. That is, being baptized on behalf of the dead.  
 Clearly, Paul and the Corinthians understood what was being discussed since there is no further explanation other than what is stated. The problem is for the rest of us. Indeed, as early as the Church fathers there were already somewhat different views as to what is actually happening in Corinth when it comes to the baptism of the dead, and up to the current day there are no less than 40 different opinions on the matter.  
 As someone who reads a lot of commentaries and focuses at times on the scholastic side of things, I have come to a certain conclusion about such questions as these. The first is we cannot be absolutely certain what is actually happening, and as such, and like most things, we can only speculate and come to the best probable conclusion. Thus, instead of looking at all 40 different views, we will look at a few of them with certain nuances.  
 The first view is that this was a vicarious baptism for those were dead. So, let’s say a family member died without being baptized. Then one of their family members would be baptized on their behalf. The problem with this is that it holds a much different view of the baptism sacrament than Paul espouses and teaches. Indeed, it would need to be a very high view of the sacraments in which case they caused an effect. There are some traditions which do have a higher view of the sacraments and as such it may fit their theology, however, most of these traditions do not have a vicarious baptism practice such as this.  
 Another view is somewhat nuanced from this first view. If we imagine a friend or family member who was on the verge of believing, or perhaps even confessed but then they died prior to be baptized. Then it could be that it is such individuals who were being baptized post mortem. Unfortunately, this too has its flaws and does not coincide well with what Paul has written elsewhere about baptism.  
 Another view has a similar kind of aspect in which case it is not someone who is dead who is baptized, but instead it is someone who is living who is baptized with the hope of being reunited with a family member who was baptized and died. So, imagine a person was a believer who was baptized and they passed away. Then, their spouse, or relative, or friend, decides to be baptized because they want to be reunited with them in the future. Clearly the issue here is that such a view of baptism is not strongly supported, nor the concept of salvation through baptism in this way.  
 Still another is that there may have been some who were being baptized above the graves of martyrs. While not likely it is possible.  
 Thiselton holds a somewhat unique view that this reflects believers on their deathbeds. They are willing to face down death with the glorious expectation of joining Christ in the life to come. Shall the Corinthians now doubt such a glorious hope?  
 As I said before, we cannot know with certainty what it means, and these are but a snippet of possible understandings. While any one of these may be the case, and while we do not know if Paul would endorse whatever thing they are doing, there is one point which is often overlooked. In Baptism we recognize we are connected to two events, Christ’s death and resurrection. If this is the only life to come, why be baptized? Why baptize into a future hope that is not actually there? It leads to a logical contradiction with their practice and their beliefs.  
 Paul now focuses on his, and the Apostles, own experience when it comes to living the Christian life. The apostles did not have an easy life. Far from it! Instead, the Apostles and their companions faced danger at all sides. In II Corinthians Paul goes into more depth as to the many trials he personally experienced. But a quick look at the book of Acts will show how often the early Christians were persecuted for the faith, from imprisonment to martyrdom.  
 Indeed, Paul takes pride not in his own self, or his own ability to overcome, but instead in two things. The first is the Corinthians themselves, and indeed all others who believe because of the witness and proclamation of the Gospel through Paul. The second is in Jesus Himself. Yes, Paul the individual was the one who went and proclaimed, but he did so in the firm belief of Jesus. As an ambassador, as one sent by his Lord. Any pride Paul has is not in his own experiences, but in the fact that Jesus really does live and he faithfully proclaims this to others. Under such a circumstance, Paul dies every day to himself, for it is not for himself he acts, but for God and others.  
 In verse 32 Paul discusses fighting wild beasts at Ephesus. There are two interpretations to this. The first is the most literal in which case Paul literally fought wild beasts at Ephesus. The second is that it is metaphorical in which case the wild beasts were those who were fanatically opposed to the Gospel, similarly to how Paul was prior to his conversion. That Paul says, “humanly speaking” may allude to the latter but there cannot be any certainty. The point is, Paul’s life has been threatened numerous times, but what does it matter if not for the resurrection?  
 Indeed, why live such a life on the verge of death if there is no resurrection? Instead, the most logical lifestyle would be to “eat, and drink, for tomorrow we die.” This is likely a quotation from Isaiah 22:13 where the inhabitants of Jerusalem aren’t concerned about the threat of Assyria. Still, the point is that if this is the only life we have then it would not lead to a life full of difficulties, but the most ease, because right here and now would be all there is.   
 Paul then, in verse 33, quotes either a well-known axiom during the time period, or makes a direct quote from a Roman author that bad company ruins good morals. Wherever he is getting the quotation from, in the end it is something they would be familiar with. The question is whether they will recognize that the “bad company” or “gang” or “clique” are those who are espousing beliefs which are altogether against the Christian faith. The simple quote also reminds us what we believe, and who influences those beliefs, has ramifications for how we live.  
 Paul concludes with verse 34. In an incredible rebuke he tells them to wake from their drunken stupor. To be in a drunken stupor is to not be able to reason well or even correctly. As it is, they are not reasoning well when it comes to their beliefs as is evident with what Paul has said previously in the chapter. As Thiselton says so well, “They are to wake up to reality and to wake up to clear thinking.”[[1]](#footnote-1) As said previously, because of their poor reasoning and therefore wrong beliefs it has led to them to espouse sinful lifestyles.  
 The criticism continues. Despite the apparent wisdom, or knowledge, that some claim, in the end they have proven that they, those who espouse such radically different beliefs than the Gospel proclaimed at the beginning of the chapter, prove that they have actually no knowledge of God. It is knowing God which allows our beliefs to flourish. This, again, reminds us of the necessity of not only feeling God, but knowing God intellectually. The more we are informed about who God really is, the more we will be influenced by Him to live according to His ways.  
 In the end, what can be said about those who have no knowledge of God? Their false views prove they have no real knowledge of this great God, and as such it brings them nothing but shame. Not only shame to the people who are already espousing these false beliefs, but also shame to the congregation for not being able to distinguish between what is truth and what is a lie. The congregation should be able to distinguish between the two, but unfortunately their difficulty shows some of their own ignorance in knowing God Himself.  
  
Main Point: The main points of these verses are for Paul to close out the argument concerning the resurrection of the dead. Paul has shown through reason why such the belief that the dead are not raised is really against the foundational belief of the Gospel itself. Thus, whoever in their midst is saying either that there is no resurrection of the dead, or that they have already attained such a glorious state in this life, are ignorant of God and His ways.  
  
Application Points  
1). Wake from Your Drunken Stupor: One of my favorite Mike Hale quotes he used to say is that “if Moses were alive today he wouldn’t say let my people go, but let my people think!” I always found this to be something true. One of the biggest flaws we have in American Christianity is our failure to reason well when it comes to the world around us. Not only when it comes to outside influences on the Church, but also when it comes to our own beliefs and why we believe what we believe.  
 Something I find as an incredible criticism is what Paul says here. Wake up from your drunken stupor. Some here know the first hand effects of such a drunken stupor, meanwhile there are others who have only seen the effects, or have secondhand knowledge of them. What we do know of drunken stupor? Is the individual able to reason with the world well? Is the individual fully in control? Is the individual fully coherent? Do they believe things which aren’t true of reality?  
 All of these things can be true. What is interesting is when those who are not in a drunken stupor still reason the same way as those who are. In such instances, when someone is fully capable of reasoning well, and fully capable of understanding, and yet chooses not to, or chooses not to pursue greater knowledge of God, is it really different than someone who is in a drunken stupor?  
 The answer is no. Not really. The cause may be different, but the effects are still the same. Not reasoning well, is no different than being in such a stupor. Living in perpetual ignorance concerning the different beliefs from our own or not having a strong foundation for our own beliefs will only lead to those other beliefs overwhelming our own.  
 Is it any surprise, then, that within the modern American Church we have seen such things happening as they did in Corinth? Is it possible that many of us have been in a drunken stupor in need of being awakened to the reality of who God is? Is it possible that we have no real responses to the world, but instead simply acquiesce to it because of our lack of knowledge of who God is?  
 How is it that so many congregations, and so many Christians, can after millennia believe things which are so against the Christian tradition and the very Gospel itself? How is it that so many congregations are affirming lifestyles which are sinful, how is it so many congregations are rejecting the very reality of our guilt before God and the glorious salvation God gives through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus His Son?  
 This can come because the Devil is so clever, but it can also come because we are so unequipped, because we have not been as prepared as we should be, against the physical and spiritual forces that bombard not only our bodies but our minds as well. We can so readily recognize the effects of sin on the body, as we struggle with health and deterioration, that we can sometimes forget the effects of sin on the mind.  
 Far too many of us have fallen into a drunken stupor when it comes to the faith. Far too many congregations, far too many Church leaders, far too many pastors, have been led by the hand into bad company leading to the ruin of good morals. Far too many of us have been so influenced by the world and the way the world reasons that we have rejected the basic tenants of the Christian faith without a fight.  
 As much as we could only blame the pastors and leaders for being asleep at the wheel, we must also remember that we each have a personal responsibility to seek and understand and proclaim the truth. As we remember from Isaiah, the leadership is especially criticized for leading the people astray, however, we cannot forget what else is proclaimed in Isaiah 9, “13 The people did not turn to him who struck them, nor inquire of the LORD of hosts. 14 So the LORD cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch and reed in one day—15 the elder and honored man is the head, and the prophet who teaches lies is the tail; 16 for those who guide this people have been leading them astray, and those who are guided by them are swallowed up.17 Therefore the Lord does not rejoice over their young men, and has no compassion on their fatherless and widows; for everyone is godless and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks folly. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still.”  
 Notice this, while it is true that the leadership has failed miserably with the people, the people themselves also have a responsibility to not be misled. They have a personal responsibility to be faithful to God even if the leadership is not. Thus, even those who the Law specifically states should be cared for, those who are the lowest in society, the orphans and the widows, God Himself has no compassion on because they are not being faithful. Because they too are in a drunken stupor.  
 Oftentimes we allow our circumstances to dictate our reactions and our lives. However, this is never to be the case when it comes to those in Christ. Christ is the motivation, not our circumstances. When we try to pawn off our poor beliefs on others, such as leadership, or the world around us, we forget to that we each have a responsibility to be on guard and aware of these false beliefs. Granted this never gives teachers, or the leadership, leeway since, especially teachers, will be judged with greater harshness, as it is said in James 3:1 when he warns, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”  
 Unfortunately our teachers have not recognized the seriousness of their teachings, nor have our pastors, and as such many are led astray by the wild ravings of those who think they know God but do not. They will be judged for the failure to be faithful to the God who has given them such positions to teach. However, even then we cannot neglect our personal responsibility to call out what is false, and to speak what is true as individuals.  
 The Church is in need of being roused, but oftentimes the teachers and innovators, and the Christian influencers will say that the Church is in need of being awakened to the injustices around them. I would say we are in need of something far more than even this. It isn’t that we need to be roused to the injustices and fighting against it, it isn’t that we need to be roused to invent new and creative ministries, it isn’t that we need to be roused to become an even better community. No, we need to be roused to KNOW GOD!  
 Oftentimes we can bypass that simple step. We can think, “Ah yes! We need to do this, do that, put our time and our energy here and there!” Meanwhile, we do a million different things as the Church and yet few seem to know God. Unless we actually know God all the other things will be distractions for the congregation. Unless the congregation is being taught and each is seeking to understand who God is and what He has accomplished through Jesus, all the extra means little, for we will not be glorifying God in these things, because God will not actually be there.  
 Indeed, notice how Paul says it even here. Awake from your drunken stupor? Why? Because they do not know God and it is evident because all their claimed knowledge of God does not lead to righteousness but instead has led to sinful lifestyles which are abhorrent to God.  
 As such, we must recognize that a revival is truly needed, a revival to know God. A revival of our ability to understand and seek to comprehend this great God who has made Himself known throughout the universe. This God who has made Himself known through His Word, and through His acts in creation. This God who has made Himself known through the person of Jesus who lived, died, was buried, and was raised by the power of God.  
 Let’s get the foundation right before we start to build upon it, that foundation can be nothing more than the truth of God as He has revealed Himself to us. If we build upon any other foundation, we will be as those building on the sand, and as soon as the storm comes it is all washed away.  
 Instead, let us build on the rock of Christ, the truth of the Gospel, the reality of what is. Let us awake from our drunken stupor and rejoice to what is real! That God exists, that He can be known, and that we can seek Him and His ways. Awake from our stupor, and let us wake up to reality, wake up to clear thinking, wake up to the glorious dawn of glory found in Jesus Christ.

1. Thiselton, Shorter, 277 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)