

Christ Did Not Send Me To Baptize

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1 Cor. 1:14-17

An objection commonly raised concerning the necessity of baptism is based on Paul's statement to the church at Corinth.

1 Cor. 1:14-17, *"I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."*

Note Paul's words: 1 Cor. 1:17, *"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel"* From which some conclude baptism must not be essential to salvation.

However, when one takes into account the context...

The immediate context of his words in this epistle.

1 Cor. 1:10-13, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"*

The remote context of Paul's ministry in Corinth.

Acts 18:1-18, *"After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them,*

Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things. And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow."

Paul preached baptism, and his comments should not be taken out of context.

In this study, let's take a closer look at the context in which we find Paul's statement. Note that...

Paul was addressing a problem at Corinth with their attitude toward preachers.

They were divided.

1 Cor. 1:10-11, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you."

Their division was a result of "who taught me".

1 Cor. 1:12, "Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ."

They were claiming, “I am of Paul”, “I am of Apollos”, etc.

As Paul expounded later, they were thinking too highly of the different preachers.

Their attitude was a mark of carnality. 1 Cor. 3:3-4, *“For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?”*

Preachers were simply fellow servants. 1 Cor. 3:5-9, *“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.”*

Thus they were not to boast in men. 1 Cor. 3:21-23, *“Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.”*

It appears related as to who baptized them, as indicated by Paul’s rhetorical questions. 1 Cor. 1:13, *“Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”*

Some evidently claimed to be disciples of those who personally baptized them. Thus, Paul was grateful he personally baptized few; thankful that he baptized only Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas, lest any should say that he was baptizing in his own name.

1 Cor. 1:14-15, *“I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.”*

So Paul was addressing a problem at Corinth. Are we to construe from this that Paul didn’t preach baptism, or didn’t think it necessary? To the contrary.

Paul’s preaching had resulted in many baptisms.

Luke records Paul’s work at Corinth, how he worked with Aquila and Priscilla. Acts 18:1-3, *“After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.”*

He recorded how he reasoned in the synagogues, testified that Jesus is the Christ, and persisted despite rejection by unbelieving Jews. Acts 18:4-7, *“And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.”*

Luke records the success of Paul’s preaching.

Crispus, ruler of the synagogue, and his household believed on the Lord (and whom Paul personally baptized).

- Acts 18:8, *“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”*
- 1 Cor. 1:14, *“I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius;”*

But also “many” of the Corinthians believed and were baptized.

Acts 18:8, *“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”*

Though Paul personally baptized few, his preaching resulted in many baptisms! Baptism must have played a significant role in his preaching. That is one reason why we must not twist Paul’s words to the church at Corinth as implying that it was not necessary. As we return to 1 Cor. 1:13, we should also note that...

Paul’s words demonstrate the necessity of baptism.

Note carefully Paul’s reasoning. For one to call himself after Paul (or any other man) required two things:

- Paul would have to be crucified for the person. 1 Cor. 1:13, *“Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”*
- One would have to be baptized in the name of Paul.

Neither happened, of course, which is why they should not be calling themselves after men.

But consider what Paul's argument means positively...

To be called after Christ, two things are required:

- Christ would have to die for the person (which of course He did).
- The person would have to be baptized in the name of Christ!

Have you been baptized in the name of Christ? If not, then you cannot rightfully be called a Christian!

In the very context of a passage which many use to claim that baptism is not essential, Paul implies one cannot be called a Christian unless they have been baptized in the name of Christ!

How then are we to understand Paul's statement ("*For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...*")? The answer is easy...

Paul was emphasizing his role as an apostle. Paul was sent to preach, not baptize.

As an apostle (which means "one sent"), Paul's role was to proclaim the gospel.

As explained to the Ephesians, he was given the task to preach "the unsearchable riches of Christ" Eph. 3:8, "*Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,*"

Which he did by inspiration. Gal. 1:11-12, "*But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*"

Though his preaching resulted in baptism (cf. Acts 18:8), it was not imperative that **he** (personally) do it.

Others could easily do the baptizing (such as his traveling companions); which happened at Corinth, for while many were baptized, he personally baptized few.

Paul used a common style of speaking.

Notice the words of Jesus in: John 6:27, "*Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.*"

Jesus was not saying one should not work, but rather was emphasizing the importance of seeking after spiritual food over physical food.

In a similar way Paul says in: 1 Cor. 1:17, *“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.”*

Paul was not saying he was not to baptize, but that his role as an apostle to preach the gospel was more important!

How others have understood Paul.

- “That is, not to baptize as my main business. Baptism was not his principle employment, though he had a commission in common with others to administer the ordinance, and occasionally did it.” – (Barnes Notes, on 1 Cor. 1:17).
- “According to Semitic idiom, ‘not so much to baptize, as...’. The word ‘sent’ involves the meaning ‘made me an apostle’. The primary function of an apostle was ‘to bear witness’.” – (Farrar Commentary on 1 Cor. 1:17).
- “Baptism was not his principal work, not the main business for which Paul was sent, it was part of his work, otherwise he would not have baptized Crispus, or Gaius, or the household of Stephanas, but preaching was his principle work.” – (Poole Annotations, 1 Cor. 1:17).
- “...bearing mind Paul’s other utterances about baptism, v.17 is to be interpreted in the light of the Semitic manner of laying stress on an issue: Christ sent Paul to preach the gospel rather than to baptize. But this is no depreciation of the value of baptism.” – (Beasley-Murray Baptism In The New Testament, p.181).

Conclusion.

When one considers all the evidence we have about the situation at Corinth, we learn...

Many were baptized as a result of Paul’s preaching. Acts 18:8, *“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”*

Paul was glad that he did personally baptized few, because of the problem that later arose in Corinth. 1 Cor. 1:14-15, *“I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.”*

In the passage so many use to say that baptism is not important...

Paul emphasizes his role as an apostle. 1 Cor. 1:17, *“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.”*

Paul’s reasoning implies the necessity of baptism (to be called after Christ, one must be baptized into the name of Christ). 1 Cor. 1:13, *“Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”*

Can you rightfully be called a Christian? True, Jesus Christ was crucified for you; but have you been baptized in the name of Christ?

