



Why Didn't Christ Send Paul To Baptize?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Q&A NUMBER: 63

www.GodSaidSo.com/QA63

Why didn't Christ send Paul to baptize? In 1 Corinthians 1:17, the apostle Paul wrote, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect." There are some who interpret Paul's statement in this verse to prove that baptism is non-essential to salvation. The claim is that surely Christ would have sent Paul to baptize if baptism was essential for salvation. Therefore, let's investigate Paul's statement during this study and discover whether this statement was made because baptism is non-essential for salvation or whether it was made for some other reason.

Examining The Context

This statement made by Paul about Christ not sending him to baptize, but to preach the gospel comes in a letter he wrote to a very divided group of Christians. There were many problems that had risen in the church at Corinth that Paul addressed in his first letter to them. Among these problems was the issue of division.

For instance, chapters 1-4 deal with the problem of the Corinthians dividing from one another and professing allegiance to men rather than to Jesus Christ alone. Chapter 5 deals with the problem of an adulterer who was permitted to remain in fellowship with the Corinthian church. Chapter 6 deals with the problem of the Corinthian Christians taking one another to court. Chapter 7 deals with issues about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Chapters 8-10 deal with issues about meat that was sacrificed to idols. Chapter 11 deals with problems concerning the submission of women and the Lord's Supper. Chapters 12-14 deal with division and problems over spiritual gifts. Chapter 15 deals with questions about the resurrection. And, chapter 16 addresses the issue of the contribution for the needy Christians in Jerusalem.

Now, with this overall picture of the 1 Corinthian letter established, let's spend a little more time focusing on the first four chapters. Throughout these first four chapters, Paul exposes their error in dividing and following after men. In 1 Corinthians 1:10-17, particularly, this statement

about Paul not being sent to baptize is made in a context of division in the Corinthian church. In verse 10, Paul pleaded with the Corinthians to speak the same thing, not to be divided at all, and to be perfectly united in the same mind and judgment. Verse 11 indicates that Paul had been made aware of a specific problem. He said that some from Chloe's household reported that there were "contentions" among the Corinthian church. He said that some were claiming to be "of Paul," some were claiming to be "of Apollos," some were claiming to be "of Cephas," and others were claiming to be "of Christ."

Therefore, they were apparently dividing from one another by following after men. The indication is strong in that they may have been following the men who taught them the gospel and/or baptized them. Paul counters that problem by addressing the fact that Jesus Christ is not divided, no man had been crucified for them, and they were not baptized in the name of any man. The implication is that they should have been united in only following Jesus Christ.

As Paul was considering the situation that was present in Corinth, consider his full statement about baptism. 1 Corinthians 1:14-17 says, "I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect."

Clearly, the reason that Paul was thankful he did not baptize more of the Corinthians was seen in that he did not want people following him. Evidently, Paul did not do a great deal of the baptizing in the city of Corinth. Instead, he only baptized a few. Now, looking back and considering the problems they were having, he was thankful concerning this. Furthermore, Paul did not consider the actual act of baptizing an individual his personal responsibility. His role was to focus on the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, please consider some additional points to see whether Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 1:17 means that baptism is unessential to an individual's salvation.

Paul Believed Baptism Was Necessary

In order for Paul's statement to mean that baptism is not essential for salvation, then we should have no evidence that Paul believed anything to the contrary. However, we *do* have evidence in the Scriptures that demonstrates Paul's belief in the essential nature of baptism. Although much of this evidence is found in Paul's own teaching, first consider what he believed whenever he obeyed the gospel.

Prior to his conversion, Paul (then called Saul) was a persecutor of the church (see Acts 8). Then, whenever Saul was traveling on the road to Damascus for the purpose of persecuting Christians, Jesus appeared to him (see Acts 9). Whenever Saul asked the Lord what the Lord wanted him to do, the Lord responded, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you

must do” (Acts 9:6). So, Saul was *not* saved on the road to Damascus. Instead, he had to go into the city of Damascus in order to learn what he had to do to be saved.

Therefore, we must follow Saul into Damascus to learn what he believed was necessary for salvation at the time of his conversion to Christ. In the city of Damascus, God had instructed a disciple by the name of Ananias to meet with and teach Saul. Once Saul arrived and met with Ananias, Acts 9:18 records that Saul “arose and was baptized.” Thus, in the city of Damascus, Saul was taught something about baptism that he “must” do.

It is not until Acts chapter 22 that we learn exactly what Saul was taught about baptism and what he believed at the time he was baptized. In this chapter, Paul was recounting his conversion to a crowd of people in Jerusalem. In verse 16, Paul said that Ananias told him, “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” So, whenever Paul was baptized, he believed that it was necessary to having his sins washed away and calling on the name of the Lord! Now, ask yourself: Did Paul change what he believed about baptism when he wrote 1 Corinthians 1:17?

Paul Taught Baptism Was Necessary

In order for Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 1:17 to mean that baptism is not necessary for salvation, then we should have no evidence in the Scriptures of the apostle Paul teaching the necessity of baptism. Yet, we have many examples of Paul writing and teaching about the necessity of baptism. Actually, this is the logical next step for Paul after believing that baptism is necessary for salvation and being baptized for the forgiveness of his sins himself.

First, consider some of Paul’s writings about the essential nature of baptism. Later in the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul taught the essential nature of baptism. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul wrote, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” By obeying the teachings God has revealed through His Holy Spirit, we are all baptized into the one body of Jesus Christ (His church). Therefore, Paul taught that in order to be in Christ’s church and be counted among the saved, we must be baptized. This is the same thing that he also taught in Galatians 3:27 when he said, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Paul’s message in Romans 6:3-4 also reveals that Paul taught baptism as being necessary for salvation. He wrote, “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” So, Paul taught that baptism stood between the old man of sin and the new man of righteousness. He taught that baptism was necessary, again, to be in Christ and that we cannot be forgiven of our past sins and begin a new life in Christ without baptism.

Second, consider some examples of Paul's teachings on baptism in the book of Acts. If you want to know whether Paul considered baptism to be necessary, it is surely helpful to look at his entire "body of work" and examine the fruit of his teaching. For instance, in Acts 16, there are two examples of conversion related to Paul's teaching. Lydia was taught by the apostle Paul. And, after being taught, she and her household were baptized (Acts 16:14-15). Then, when Paul had "spoke the word of the Lord" to a Philippian jailor and his household, "immediately he and all his family were baptized" (Acts 16:32-33).

Concerning the Corinthians themselves, consider what is taught in Acts 18:1-8. Whenever Paul was preaching among them, verse 8 says, "Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized." Thus, their baptism was directly related to their hearing and believing the gospel's message. Finally, Acts 19 also demonstrates that some in the city of Ephesus were baptized in the name of Jesus after hearing Paul's teaching (see verse 5). Now, ask yourself: Did Paul change what he taught about baptism whenever he wrote 1 Corinthians 1:17?

Paul Did Baptize

Finally, as we consider this question and objection to the essential nature of baptism, understand plainly that Paul *did* baptize people – and this act of baptizing was directly authorized by Jesus Christ (according to Matthew 28:18-20). According to this passage, all the apostles were to teach, baptize, and continue teaching. Paul's only point in 1 Corinthians 1:17 is that his focus was on teaching the gospel's message (and, you might note that teaching the gospel included teaching the necessity of baptism – as seen in Acts 8:35-39).

Go back and look again at 1 Corinthians 1:14-17. Paul did baptize Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas. Certainly, he did not do this contrary to the instructions of Jesus Christ. Instead, he did it with Christ's authority. Paul just did not baptize everyone he taught the gospel – as someone else could do the actual baptizing for him.

Conclusion

Paul was sent to teach the gospel. That was his focus and his mission. This included baptizing some people. But, other people could do the baptizing for him after he taught them. Paul was only thankful that he did not baptize more in Corinth because he did not want people to follow him. Still, Paul believed and taught that baptism was essential for salvation!

Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

Study Number: QA643

Written by Eric Krieg

Copyright: Copyright © 2018 GodSaidSo Press. Please use this material to God's glory and honor. Feel free to copy and distribute this material in any way that will bring God glory and help souls to be saved. However, you may not take any of the material out of context or change the material in any way. Please provide the author with the proper credit for the material.

Scripture quotations: Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.