
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: **What did the apostle mean when he wrote, "Christ sent me not to baptize"?**

One of the apostles of Christ wrote the following passage of Scripture:

1 Corinthians 1:17

17 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.

Many have read this passage and have drawn the conclusion that baptism must not be necessary. After all, it would seem that if baptism were essential for salvation, then Jesus would have sent all the apostles forth to baptize.

WE MUST HARMONIZE THE BIBLE

Now ... in trying to understand any passage of Scripture, we need to choose an interpretation that will harmonize with the rest of the Bible. If there are two possible interpretations, one which contradicts other passages and one which harmonizes with other passages, common sense dictates that we must choose the interpretation that harmonizes with all other passages.

We have before us 1 Corinthians 1:17 which says, "Christ sent me not to baptize," and many are interpreting this to mean that baptism is not essential for salvation. But this is the wrong interpretation to choose because it contradicts other plain passages of Scriptures. The New Testament makes it perfectly clear that God made baptism absolutely essential in order for men to be saved. Listen carefully to the following passages of Holy Scripture:

John 3:5

5 ... unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Mark 16:16

16 "He who believes and is baptized will be saved;

Acts 2:38

38 ... "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 22:16

16 ... Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

Romans 6:3

3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

Galatians 3:27

27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

1 Peter 3:21

21 There is also an antitype which now saves us; baptism ...

In this last passage the Bible plainly and clearly states that "baptism doth also now save us."

Since baptism is the final step of obedience that saves men from their sins, we must be careful not to interpret 1 Corinthians 1:17 so that it contradicts these plain Bible passages. Is there, then, an interpretation that would harmonize all of these passages together? YES!!!

THE MEANING OF THE PASSAGE

To understand 1 Corinthians 1:17, let us back up to verse 10:

10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

It is wrong and sinful for Christians to be divided among themselves. This is why all denominations are sinful, because they divide Christians into sects and factions rather than uniting men in Christ.

11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.

12 Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."

Notice the Corinthians were divided. Some of them felt superior to others because of who had baptized them. When Paul baptized some of them a little group would rally around Paul and claim to be followers of him. Some were baptized by Apollos and would rally around him and claim to be followers of him. Others were rallying around Cephas and some around Christ. Now listen to the question Paul asks:

13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Notice carefully this verse ... it's so important. To be a disciple of Paul two things were necessary: (a) Paul would have to be crucified for them and (b) they would have to be baptized in the name of Paul. What does this imply? It implies that to be a true disciple of Jesus: (a) Jesus would have to be crucified for us and (b) we would have to be baptized in the name of Jesus. In other words, if a person has not been baptized in water for the "remission of sins" he is not a true disciple of Christ.

Now the questions are, "Is Christ divided?" and the answer is NO! He is not divided. Christians should be united rather than divided. Again, the question is asked, "Was Paul crucified for you?" and the answer is NO! Finally he asks, "Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" and the answer is NO! These Corinthians should not have been divided among themselves and following different men.

14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,

15 lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.

16 Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other.

Here Paul says that he was thankful that he had not baptized very many of these Corinthians. The reason is given in verse 15, "Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name."

Rather than following the Lord who commanded baptism, these Corinthians were following the person who actually did the baptizing. Now:

17 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.

Paul was sent forth as an "apostle" of Jesus Christ. The word "apostle" means "one sent forth." Why did Jesus make Paul an apostle and send him forth? Did Jesus make Paul an apostle just so he could baptize people? Not at all! Any disciple of Christ can baptize sinners. Paul was not made an apostle and sent forth just so he could walk out into water and immerse people, but rather he was made an apostle and sent forth so he could reveal the Gospel to the world.

Ephesians 3:5

5 ... [the Gospel] was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:

Do you see the point? The Lord did not reveal the Gospel to ordinary men. He chose special men called apostles and prophets and He sent the Holy Spirit upon them to inspire them so they could reveal the Gospel to the world. Paul is reminding the brethren in 1 Corinthians 1:17 that he was not made an apostle and sent forth into the world just merely so he could baptize people, because any disciple can do that. It does not require an apostle, or a prophet in order for a sinner to be baptized. But rather, Paul was sent forth to reveal and preach the Gospel.

Rather than teaching that baptism is not necessary, 1 Corinthians 1:17 is teaching the mission of an apostle. Baptism is still essential and necessary for anyone wishing to obey the Lord and be saved from their sins.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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