

"Christ Sent Me Not To Baptize ..."

"... but to preach the gospel, not in words of wisdom, lest the cross of Christ should be made void" (1 Cor. 1:17).

Many brethren had come to Ephesus from Corinth while Paul was there. Those of the household of Chloe had informed him of the divisions present in Corinth (1:11). The arrival of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus had been a source of rejoicing for him (1 Cor. 16:17). The information those of Chloe's household gave him that was different ones were identifying themselves as of "Paul," "Apollos," "Cephas," or "Christ." Paul was stirred and by the spirit he was led to say, *"I thank God that I baptized none of you save Crispus and Gaius, lest any man should say ye were baptized into my name" (1 Cor. 1:15).* Then, as an afterthought, he added, *"And I baptized also the household of Stephanus" (1 Cor. 1:16).* Paul's words, *"Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel,"* have led some to argue that baptism is not essential to salvation. Such a conclusion was not the intent of Paul's words for he taught that baptism is essential to salvation. He wrote Galatians that *"for ye are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus for as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26f).* To put on Christ is to put on all spiritual blessings of which salvation must certainly be regarded (Eph. 1:3). The Romans were reminded that *"all we who were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death."* We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death. It was of baptism Paul was speaking when he further added, *"Ye became obedient from the heart to that form of doctrine whereunto ye were delivered, and being then made free from sin" (Rom. 6:3f; 6:17, KJV).*

Furthermore, to argue that Paul words, *"God sent me not to baptize,"* meant Paul was not commissioned to baptize flies in the face of the facts of the case. He claimed to be on equal footing with the others apostles and that what he preached did not vary one iota from what they taught (Gal. 2:2-6). Seeing that was true, he could hardly have meant that baptism was no part of his commission, for it was of theirs! Matthew's record of Jesus' commission to the eleven was this: *"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them ..." (Mt. 28:18)* The twelve were sent to baptize. Paul was also. Further, if God did not send Paul to baptize, why did he do it? Did he act without authority in baptizing the house of Crispus, Gaius, and Stephanus?

Still, Paul did say, *"God sent me not to baptize."* Just precisely did he mean? The phrase Paul used was one of those not/but statements which every Bible student is familiar with. In such a phrase two statements are put together,

apparently in contrast with each other, yet both statements are true. One of the statements is denied in order to emphasize the importance and significance of the other. For example, Jesus told certain Jews, "*Work not for the food which perisheth, but for the food which abideth unto eternal life*" (Jn. 6:27). Did Jesus forbid work on the part of His hearers? Who can believe that? But which food should be the greater goal each labored for -- physical food or spiritual food? Surely that question needs no answer.

Baptism is a part of the gospel. Jesus said, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*" (Mk. 16:16). Peter said on Pentecost, "*Repent ye and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins*" (Acts 2:38). He wrote, "*Baptism doth also now save us*" (1 Pet. 3:21). Paul was commanded himself to "*arise and be baptized and wash away your sins*" (Acts 22:16). Paul would not, could not, be true to Jesus who called him to preach unless he preached what Jesus said regarding baptism. But did the Lord intend that Paul should personally baptize each person he taught? Of course not, nor did Paul baptize all who obeyed the gospel at his teaching. The important thing for Paul was to preach the gospel (which required that he tell men what they had to do to be saved -- i.e., believe and be baptized); who it was that baptized that penitent believer was of no great importance. Many could, and did do that. Paul usually had a corp of young men who traveled with him, who very likely baptized those taught by him. These had to be baptized to be saved; but it wasn't necessary that Paul baptize them to secure their salvation!

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