

Christ Did Not Send Me to Baptize

by John Piper

Paul's mission was to preach the gospel and magnify Christ, not to baptize, and baptism should express reliance on Christ alone for salvation.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19, Acts 9:18, Romans 6:3, 1 Corinthians 1:14, Colossians 2:12

Topics: "Baptism", "Christian Mission"

Description

John Piper delves into 1 Corinthians 1:10-17, exploring Paul's approach to baptism and the reasons behind his statement that Christ did not send him to baptize. Piper addresses four key questions: Did Paul oppose baptism or discourage converts from being baptized? Why did Paul not baptize all his new converts? What was the goal of Paul's mission? And what does this imply about our view of baptism?

Transcript

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

It is surprising to me that Paul would say, "Christ did not send me to baptize," when, in fact, one of the last things Jesus said to His disciples was, "Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. . ." In order to understand what Paul meant by denying he was sent to baptize we need to answer four questions:

Did Paul oppose baptism or try to discourage converts from being baptized?

Why did Paul not make it a practice to baptize all his new converts?

What was the goal of Paul's mission?

What does all this imply about our view of baptism?

1) First, then, did Paul oppose baptism or try to discourage converts from being baptized? From Paul's other letters, as well as from what we can see in the book of Acts the answer is, No. On the contrary Paul assumed that all the believers he wrote to were baptized and he based important parts of his teaching upon this common experience of all the believers. For example in Romans 6:3 Paul says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father we too might walk in newness of life." Here Paul assumes that all believers have experienced

baptism and that they have been instructed about its meaning. Another example is Paul's letter to the Colossians chapter 2 verse 12, when he says to all the Christians, "You were buried with Christ in baptism in which you were also raised through faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead." Here again Paul does not treat baptism as an option that some believers choose and others don't. He assumes that this was the act by which people expressed their faith and entered into salvation. (I should mention in passing that the phrase "through faith" in Colossians 2:12 is one of the main reasons I practice believer's baptism and not infant baptism.) It appears, therefore from Paul's letters that he did not oppose but approved baptism and based some of his teaching on it.

The same thing turns up in the book of Acts which records Paul's missionary work. First of all Paul himself was baptized after his conversion. Acts 9:18 says: "Paul regained his sight; then he rose and was baptized and took food and was strengthened." The several incidents from Paul's missionary journeys show that Paul did not discourage his converts from being baptized, but on the contrary encouraged them. In Acts 16 Paul preaches in Philippi and verses 14 and 15 describe what happened to a woman named Lydia: "The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul and she was baptized and also her household. . ." The same chapter records how Paul was soon thrown into prison in Philippi and how there was an earthquake that opened the doors and gave Paul and Silas an occasion to lead the jailer to Christ right there in the middle of the night. Listen to the way it happened (verses 30-33): "'Men, what must I do to be saved?' (the jailer said). And they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.' And they spoke the Word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. And the jailer took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds and was baptized at once with all his family." This event shows that Paul believed quite strongly in seeing that his converts were baptized--and quickly too.

But could it be that the church Paul started in Corinth was different and that's why Paul wrote them and said, "I baptized hardly any of you"? In Acts 18:11 we learn that Paul worked in Corinth about a year and a half and verse 8 says, "Many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized." So Corinth was not different from all the other places Paul went: his converts were always baptized.

But the interesting thing in Acts is that never do we read that Paul himself did the baptizing. This fits with what he tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:14, namely, that he baptized only a handful of his many converts. He is thankful that he did not make a practice of baptizing his converts.

2) This brings us to our second question: Why, did Paul not make it a practice to baptize all his new converts? Why did he evidently let Timothy, or Silas or Luke do the actual immersing in water? The answer Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 1:15 is this: I avoid doing the baptizing myself so that none of my converts will be tempted to say they were baptized into my name. What lies behind this concern?

Paul had a tremendous authority in the early church. He had seen the risen Christ and had been commissioned by Him to teach the churches. There was a risk, therefore, that he be idolized and that people become proud of being Paul's converts. And apparently this misplaced pride had begun to spread in the Corinthian church, and faction formed saying, "'I belong to Paul' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas.'" The body of Christ at Corinth was being torn asunder by the boasting of different factions in their favorite teacher.

Paul wants to stop this boasting and the divisions it was causing. So he says in 3:5 "What is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos

watered but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." Then in 3:21 he draws the inference. "So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours, and you are Christ's and Christ is God's." In other words, as he says in 1:31, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Paul tried hard not to do anything that would distract attention from the Lord Jesus Christ and from the power of His cross (1:17). And it may be that he discovered early in his ministry that when he baptized his own converts they were tempted to boast about that. So he left almost all the baptizing for his associates to do in order to direct attention away from himself to Christ.

3) And that brings us to our third question: What was the goal of Paul 's mission? He said, "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." Baptism Paul could hand over to an associate, but not the preaching of the gospel. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe; baptism is a symbolic expression of that belief. The gospel is the good news that anyone who receives Christ as Savior and Lord will be saved. Baptism is an appeal to God for that salvation. Therefore, the preaching of the gospel is primary and the work of Christ on the cross is vastly more important than the work of any man in baptism. What matters is not who baptizes you but into whom are you baptized.

Paul 's mission was to magnify Christ and to save men by preaching the gospel. And he was willing to give up anything that hindered that mission.

4) So in conclusion what does all this imply about our view of baptism? Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Jesus (Matthew 28:19,20). And for that very reason it should never divert our attention away from Christ onto a man. It should express our desire to rely on Christ alone for salvation and to boast only in Him. The center of our attention in this act should not be the method, or the place or the person baptizing, but rather Jesus Christ, His death for our sin and His glorious resurrection. May that be the focus today to His praise and glory. "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

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