

# Did Paul Believe Baptism was Essential?

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A common argument against the essential nature of baptism, is based on some inspired words from Paul to the Corinthians. Paul wrote:

*For Christ **did not send me to baptize**, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.*

1 Corinthians 1:17 (Emphasis Mine)

Taken out of its context, this verse appears to say exactly what many hope and teach that it says: That baptism is not important or essential. If it were, Christ would have sent Paul to baptize.

How are we to understand Paul when he says, "Christ did not send me to baptize"? As with any passage of Scripture, a consideration of the surrounding context will unlock the meaning. In this particular case, the context is very easy to see. Paul is addressing the Corinthians about the divisions that exist between them.

*Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

1 Corinthians 1:10

Among the many issues Paul addresses with this first century congregation is the issue of division. The brethren at Corinth were dividing themselves based on various allegiances to teachers. The divisions were so strong that they were accompanied by quarrels with one another.

*For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."*

1 Corinthians 1:11-12

Based on Paul's inspired description of the problem, it is not hard too imagine what was going on in Corinth. You had one contingent of brethren boasting their allegiance to Peter. Can you hear them? "Peter was one of the original apostles! You can't say that about Paul." Then those following Paul would shout back, "Paul started this local work. The man has traveled the world preaching Christ. He is much greater than Peter."

Regarding this foolish fussing, fighting, and allegiances to various teachers, Paul asks:

*Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*

1 Corinthians 1:13

The last thing Paul wanted was brethren more devoted to himself than to Jesus. He reminds them that he did not die for them. They were not baptized in his name, so that they should be

called, *Paulites*. This is important in understanding his statement regarding not being sent to baptize.

*I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.*

1 Corinthians 1:14-17

When the context is understood, it is clear that Paul was not against baptism, nor believed it was not essential. The statement is made in regards to those who were more devoted to Paul than to Christ.

The book of Acts covers Paul's missionary journeys and his consistent practice of baptizing believers, as commanded by Jesus in the Great Commission (Mark 16:16). Notice the examples that are found:

Paul himself (Acts 9:18; 22:16)  
The household of Lydia (Acts 16:14-15)  
The Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:31-33)  
The Corinthians (Acts 18:8)  
The Disciples of John (Acts 19:1-5)

A survey of Paul's letters will show the inspired apostle thought baptism was very essential to salvation.

*Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

Romans 6:3-4

*Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.*

Colossians 2:12

*For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

Galatians 3:27

These passages hardly sound like they were penned by a man who did not think being baptized was essential to salvation. Paul practiced and taught baptism. His preaching and letters are clear: We are baptized into Christ. If it takes baptism to get into Christ, then the essential nature of it should be abundantly clear.