

“Christ Sent Me Not to Baptize”

By Tony Melton

The apostle Paul wrote, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel . . . (1 Corinthians 1:17). In this verse, many believe Paul is teaching that water baptism is not essential. But is this really what he taught?

Paul said that Christ had not sent him to baptize. However, when we read the great commission, we find that Jesus commanded the apostles to preach and baptize (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15, 16). We also find that Paul did baptize people (1 Corinthians 1:14, 15). We conclude by this, that Paul had something else in mind when he said that Christ had not sent him to baptize.

By reading the context, we see a major problem in the church at Corinth. The members were desiring to follow the preachers of the gospel, rather than Christ. Some were saying that they were “of Paul, Apollos and of Cephas” (1 Corinthians 1:12). As a result of this problem, Paul taught that salvation was in the message, not in the messenger.

He wanted the people to know that God had not sent him to baptize for the purpose of making disciples. For example, God had sent John the baptist with the special mission of baptizing (John 1:6, 33). What was the result of John’s baptism? John had his own personal followers or disciples (Matthew 9:14). They were called “disciples of John” (Luke 5:33; 7:18).

Paul is not saying that baptism is not necessary. He was dealing with a specific problem the Corinthians had in desiring to be his disciples. For this reason, Paul said that God had not sent him to baptize (like John) for the purpose of making disciples. Therefore, the Corinthians should never say, “I am of Paul” (1 Corinthians 1:12).

In reality, Paul is not even considering whether baptism is essential or not in this verse. He had been authorized only to preach the gospel and *make followers of Christ* (not personal disciples). He did this by baptizing them in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16).