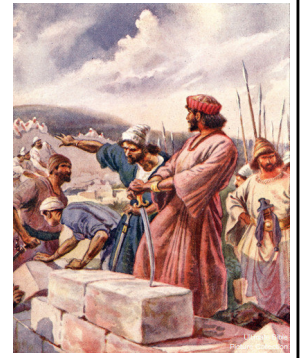


# The Sword and The Trowel

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded (Nehemiah 4:17-18)

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## Christ Sent Me Not To Baptize

It would be foolhardy to the nth degree to deny that the subject of baptism is not found in the New Testament. It would also be foolhardy to deny that there is controversy on this subject. Some, of which I am one, hold to the doctrinal point of few that baptism is necessary for salvation. On the other hand, a majority of religious people believes and teaches that one is saved before and without baptism and, furthermore, that baptism has little, if anything, to do with salvation.

I do not want anyone to think that I am, in the beginning of this article, erecting a straw man that I can then tear down. Let me give you a few examples of what some say about baptism and salvation:

Richard Longnecker, author of the section on Acts in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* says on Acts 2:38, "This shows that for Luke at least, and probably also for Peter, while baptism with water was the expected symbol for conversion, it was not an indispensable criterion for salvation" (Vol. 9, p. 284).

Archibald Thomas Robertson in his classic work *Word Pictures in the New Testament* says on Mark 16:16, "The omission of baptized with 'disbelieveth' would seem to show that Jesus does not make baptism essential to salvation. Condemnation rests on disbelief, not on baptism. So salvation rests on belief. Baptism is merely the means of the new life, not the means of securing it." (Vol. I, p. 405).

Charles Hodge, author of the widely accepted work, *Systematic Theology*, says this about baptism as a condition of salvation, "Although not the means of salvation or necessary to its attainment, its benefits are great and manifold" (Vol. III, p. 585).

The English Standard Version Study Bible (Crossway Bible) with notes on 1

Corinthians by Frank S. Thielman, says on 1 Corinthians 1:17, "Hearing and believing the gospel, unlike baptism, is essential to salvation (Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:21; Eph. 1:13)."

I go on and list more, but these are enough to illustrate that there are resources that will affirm that baptism is not essential to salvation. Much of the denial centers on the deniers holding to a "salvation by faith" doctrinal position. This is further strengthened by the common denominational view that baptism, along with the Lord's Supper, are sacraments of the church. In the view of most denominationalists and their scholars, the church occupies a less than essential role in the scheme of salvation. Thus, any sacraments of such a non-essential entity are likewise considered non-essential. I deny that the church has sacraments of the kind suggested by those in the denominational world. This sacrament business was invented by the Catholic Church and later adopted and adapted by the denominational world. I do not have the space to address my denial in full in this article. Suffice to say that the New Testament says nothing about such sacramental nonsense.

In any discussion of the relationship of baptism to salvation, those who deny any such relationship will ultimately turn to 1 Corinthians 1:17 as their "big gun." They believe that this passage seals the deal on baptism not being essential to salvation.

Let us look at the passage at this time (unless otherwise noted, all scripture citations are from the KJV):

*For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.*

So, Paul says that he was not sent to baptize. From that point the erroneous

conclusion is then reached that baptism is not a prerequisite to salvation and therefore non-essential. This conclusion is reached without considering the verse in its immediate context AND without considering it in its larger context. Let us consider both before reaching any conclusion.

### The Immediate Context

Paul was writing to the church at Corinth in response to reports of much turmoil and outright division. He first addresses the need for them to be united on faith and practice (1 Cor. 10).

This was necessary due to the severely fractured nature of the church in Corinth. They were divided along party lines with some saying, "I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12). We do not know for sure if these were the actual divisions or if Paul was simply using familiar names to make his point. Nevertheless, he indicates that the parties existence likely centered on who had baptized the various individuals. "Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect" (1 Cor. 13-17). Obviously Paul is saying that developing party lines on the basis of who baptized whom is unacceptable and ought to be stopped.

Yet here is another surprising truth - even though Paul might not have been sent to baptize, he did baptize a few at

Corinth (Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas)! Paul arrived first at Corinth (Acts 18:1) and was later joined by Silas and Timothy (Acts 18:5). The results of their efforts are seen in Acts 18:8 in that "...many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." In other words they heard the gospel and believed it and then desired to obey it. Here we see the administration of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in all its fullness (Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-16).

Instead of jumping to the conclusion that baptism is unnecessary to salvation because Paul said he was not sent to baptize, consider what this really means. The Corinthians who believed were baptized (Acts 18:8). After this they began dividing themselves into various parties (1 Cor. 1:12). Paul appealed for unity (1 Cor. 1:10) and affirmed that he had been called to preach the gospel, not to be the head of some sect of Christians (1 Cor. 1:13, 17). This is the REASON for Paul's words. It was hardly a treatise on how baptism is not essential for salvation. I am of the opinion that only an incomplete or distorted reading of this passage coupled with a biased exegesis would lead one to think that it was.

Finally, consider this: why should Paul bring up the subject of baptism at all, especially in conjunction with the momentous events of the crucifixion of Christ and the division of the body of Christ, if baptism were not among the most vital and serious aspects of the gospel message? How could Paul so forcefully on the same point remind them of who was crucified for them and of the name in which they were baptized, if baptism were not in some sense worthy of such a conjunction?

### ***The Larger Context***

The immediate context of 1 Corinthians 1:17 does not support the idea that baptism is not essential to salvation. However, what about the larger context which would be the New Testament? What is said in the New Testament about baptism and salvation? Is it essential or not?

Jesus told His apostles, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. (Mk. 16:15-16). Who did Jesus say would be

saved? The one who believes and is baptized. You cannot be saved just by believing or just by being baptized, but by a combination of the two.

The gospel was preached for the first time under the Great Commission on the Day of Pentecost. There were some who "were pricked in the heart" and cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). This indicated their belief in the gospel message about Jesus Christ. Peter's answer to this earnest entreaty was "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). This apostle, who was with Jesus and taught by Him and who received His commission, said that forgiveness (remission) of sins followed repentance and baptism. There were about three thousand who were baptized (Acts 2:41). These same ones were among those whom "...the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

Philip had an encounter with a man from Ethiopia (Acts 8:27-29). This man was reading Isaiah the prophet and did not understand what he was reading (Acts 8:30-34). Philip began at the very point of his lack of understanding and "preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:36). The next immediate verse has the Ethiopian man asking about baptism. Where did he learn of baptism? Was it in the scroll (book) of Isaiah he had been reading? No, it is not there. He must have learned of this from Philip when he was **preaching Jesus** to him. Then what happened next? This Ethiopian man confessed his faith in Jesus Christ and was baptized (Acts 8:37-38).

A series of events culminated with Peter preaching in the house of Cornelius. At the conclusion of his preaching Peter "commanded them to be baptized" (Acts 10:48). This was not some non-essential thing with Peter. It was not something that was optional. It was not administered as some sacrament of the church. It was a command and as such would have to have authority behind it. That authority came from Jesus Christ and so any command from Peter constituted a command from the Lord.

We can read in Romans 6:23 how "...the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (NKJV). Now the question is: How do we get into Christ? We find the answer earlier in

Romans 6:3. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" It is also found in Galatians 3:27. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Baptism is how one gets into Christ where eternal life is found.

Peter wrote, "baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). Peter understood that baptism saves.

Though there are other passages we could examine, what have we seen from these? Jesus said baptism saves. Those on Pentecost who were baptized were forgiven of their sins and saved. To preach Jesus is to preach baptism and cause a desire for it. Baptism is a command. Eternal life is for those who are baptized in Christ. Peter wrote that baptism saves.

Now what do you think about baptism now? Based on what we have seen in the larger context, is it essential to salvation? Can you see the connection between baptism and salvation? I think you can and that you will unless you are so biased that the simplicity of the gospel message eludes you.

### ***Conclusion***

No, Paul was not sent to baptize. Like any other before him or contemporary with him or after him, it is necessary to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ and baptize those who believe it and are willing to obey it. Paul wrote, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6). All anyone can do is plant and water the seed. We cannot force people to respond. We must trust that the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16).

Paul DID preach the gospel and he DID baptize some. That part is clear. He did this because it is what Jesus ordained (Mk. 16:16). It is all that anyone can do.

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