

WHAT ABOUT 1 CORINTHIANS 1:17?

Some folks point to 1 Corinthians 1:17 where Paul said, “For Christ sent me not to baptize...” in an attempt to eliminate baptism from God’s plan of salvation. Is this what Paul is saying?

1. First consider that if Christ did not want Paul to baptize and Paul had baptized (vv. 14, 16) then would this not be charging Paul with sin? Actually, it has Paul in outright rebellion against Christ. If not, why not?
2. Second consider the context. Paul is addressing division in the Corinthian church (vs. 10), some claiming to follow Paul, Apollos, Cephas (Peter) and Christ (vs. 12). Because of this Paul said, “I thank God that I baptized none of you...” except a few. Why? The reason is in vs. 15, “Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.” What Paul is saying is that he was not sent to be the one to administer baptism, i.e. the physical act. Because of the problems at Corinth he was glad he didn’t. (*Compare with John 4:1-2. What if Jesus personally, physically baptized some, would these possibly have thought themselves above those baptized by disciples?*)

An important question: Is Paul saying that baptism is unnecessary to salvation? That is not his point and to claim such is to align Paul against other passages of scripture (*Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 2:38*), twist the scriptures, and would cause contradiction (*Romans 6:3f; Galatians 3:26-27*).

3. Thirdly notice that the word “baptize” is a verb. The point is on the act of baptism (i.e. on who is doing the immersing) not to remove baptism from the gospel. One should not place “special emphasis” on the one administering baptism.

Since baptism places one “into Christ” where all spiritual blessings are (Ephesians 1:3), Paul is not removing baptism as essential to obeying the gospel. To remove baptism is to remove salvation. (*1 Peter 3:21*)

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