

WATER BAPTISM AND PAUL'S TEACHING ON IT...

St. Paul wrote to Timothy, many centuries ago:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Tim. 3: 16).

The Apostle referred, of course, to the sacred Scriptures, also called The Bible and The Word of God. All of it, he says, is "God-breathed and profitable," to "teach," to "reprove," to "correct" and to "instruct."

But why, then, have so many heresies and false teachings sprung up through the years - all based upon the Bible? And why have so many thousands of sincere people been led astray by these false teachings?

The reason is that teachers and followers alike have failed to heed another important statement which Paul made in this same letter prior to his declaration that all Scripture is inspired of God and profitable. This statement is found in Chapter 2, Verse 15:

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth." (II Tim. 2:15)

The Bible can prove "profitable" to us only as we "rightly divide" it. We must rightly divide the Word of truth for the simple reason that if we do not do this we can pervert the truth and change it into error. Through the centuries God has periodically altered His dealings with mankind. Many religious rites which were commanded in Old Testament times are positively forbidden in this present dispensation of grace.

In Old Testament times, for example, animal sacrifices were required for acceptance with God, and from John the Baptist through Pentecost water baptism was required (**Lev. 17:11; Mk. 1:4; Acts 2:38**), but some years after the death of Christ Paul was sent forth with "the preaching of the cross," and he declared that: "We have redemption through [Christ's] blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace" (**Eph. 1:7**) "Being justified freely by [God's] grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (**Rom. 3:24**).

It was to Paul, "the Apostle of the Gentiles," that our glorified Lord committed "the dispensation of the grace of God" and it was he who wrote the epistles to "the Church, which is His Body."

Paul wrote more books than all the other New Testament writers combined, yet his epistles will be searched in vain for one command, or even one exhortation to be baptized with water. Every diligent Bible student should compare this fact with such passages as **Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38**.

[Mark 16:16] **He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.**

[Acts 2:38] **Then Peter said unto them, 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.**

PAUL AND WATER BAPTISM

We have, in **I Cor. 1:14-18** a clear statement by Paul to the effect that water baptism did not belong to his special commission. Read just as it is it bears unequivocal testimony to the fact that he was not sent to baptize as the twelve had been.

[1 Corinthians 1:14] **I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius;**

^[15] **Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.**

^[16] **And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.**

^[17] **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.**

^[18] **For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.**

This passage is difficult for many to accept. Could Paul actually have meant, that he had not been sent to baptize; that baptism was not part of his God-given commission? Could he not have meant that he was not sent *primarily* to baptize, but to preach the gospel?

This question has thus far generated more heat than light, with the result that divergent views on the subject have been seriously polarized. Let us then ask God for open minds and hearts to receive what God *says* on the subject.

First, it is clear that *John the Baptist* was sent to baptize, for in **John 1:33** he refers to our Lord as “*He that sent me to baptize with water.*”

We know too that *the eleven* (or twelve) were sent to baptize, for in **Matt. 28:19** we have the record of our Lord’s commission to them to “Go. . . and teach all nations, *baptizing them . . .*” They began to carry out this commission at Pentecost, baptizing about three thousand of their hearers in that one day.

But their message was rejected by the first nation, Israel, and Stephen was stoned, followed by a general uprising against the Disciples of Christ. It was then that God raised up Paul, *another* apostle, saved and commissioned entirely apart from the twelve, and far away from Jerusalem. And where do we find one sentence indicating that this *other apostle* was ever commissioned to baptize? Nowhere. Thus we must conclude that Paul meant just what he said in **I Cor. 1:17**: “*For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel. . .*” Indeed, if Paul, like the twelve, was divinely sent to baptize with water, we can see no justification whatever for his thanking God that he had baptized so few.

It is argued, however, with regard to **I Cor. 1:14-17**, that Paul was glad he had baptized so few only because of the abuse of the ceremony by the Corinthian believers. The Lord's Supper, however, had been even more greatly abused by these same Corinthians, but he did not deny that this celebration belonged to his special commission. In fact in **I Cor. 11:23** he makes it emphatically clear that he had "*received of the Lord,*" the instructions concerning the Lord's Supper, and sternly rebuked the Corinthian believers for their abuse of this glad and sacred celebration.

In summary: Was John the Baptist sent to baptize? Yes, we have Scripture for that. Were the eleven (or twelve) sent to baptize? Yes, we have Scripture for that. Was Paul sent to baptize? No, *and we have Scripture for that!* Indeed we have both negative and positive evidence that the risen, glorified Lord did *not* send Paul to baptize, that this was *not* part of his special commission.

Any who would seek to explain away or alter the simple meaning of **I Cor.1:17**, should find us some passage of Scripture that states, or clearly implies, that water baptism *was* part of Paul's God-given commission.

PERTINENT QUESTIONS

1. If water baptism belonged to God's program for the present dispensation of grace where, in your Bible, would you expect to find it commanded? In the Old Testament, the Four "Gospels," the Epistles of Paul, the Book of Revelation?
2. Does Paul, anywhere in his epistles, command or even exhort baptism by water? If your answer is "Yes," does the verse you are thinking of say anything about water? Have you carefully considered 1 Cor. 1:14; 1 Cor. 12:13 and Heb. 6:1.2?
3. If Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38 mean what they say, does it not follow that water baptism was required for salvation at Pentecost, under the so-called "Great Commission"? How is it, then, that so many who believe that the Church of this dispensation began at Pentecost, nevertheless teach that water baptism has nothing to do with salvation?

[Mark 16:16] He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

[Acts 2:38] Then Peter said unto them, 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.

4. Can you have full confidence in a pastor or Bible teacher who alters Mark 16:16 to read; "He that believeth and is saved should *then* be baptized"?
5. Would it be merely unnecessary, or would it be *wrong*, in this day of grace, to offer the blood sacrifices once required for the remission of sins? Then would it be merely unnecessary, or would it be *wrong* to practice the baptism by water, also once required for the remission of sins?