

PREFACE

Time and again we are reminded of—and reminded of the critical importance of—the centrality of Christ. If you read God's word and get nothing more out of it, at least get that Christ Jesus—and in many aspects of this we can assume that Jesus and God are essentially synonymous—that Jesus is, and is to be in believers' lives, the central focus of everything. Paul, and God's word as a whole, repeatedly make this point. As Paul states in Romans regarding God, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." (Romans 11:36)

In Hebrews the writer tells us that no celestial being, no prophet is more important than God's Son, because it is now through Him—Christ Jesus—that He speaks.

Read Hebrews 1:1-4.

And in Chapter Three of Hebrews notice the similarities to our text in First Corinthians, regarding following after other of God's earthly representatives (e.g., Apollos, Paul, Peter), where the writer compares Moses—a figure exalted by Jews—to Christ.

Read Hebrews 3:1-6.

Moses *served* the house; Christ *built* the house = the church.

And in the letter to the Colossians we find perhaps the most glowing affirmation of the centrality of Christ Jesus.

Read Colossians 1:15-20.

Pastor Alistair Begg summarizes how all of this applies to the Corinthian text.

Alistair Begg: Jesus makes church, church. Therefore, when a church loses focus on Jesus, it loses *everything*.

Since v10 of our text this has been Paul's emphasis. He stresses the need for *unity*, for agreement, that everyone in the church be of the same mind, saying the same thing, having the same judgment. But this is not just a mechanical slavishness to identification, such as everyone wearing the same color clothes; nor is it to be a unity based on just anything—"Let's all agree to meet on Tuesdays instead of Sundays."

No, we are to unify around a *person*—and not just any person, but the Person who is One with God, the person who was crucified to redeem every believer, the person in whose name we are baptized, and into whose life *our* life is now to be subsumed.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:13-17.

v14

On one level the apostle, in vv14-16, seems to throw in a parenthetical interruption to his thoughts. (In fact the NIV places v16 in parentheses.) But this is also more than that; Paul is making an important point here that speaks to what he has been saying in vv12-13.

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,

Paul is not denigrating baptism; in this verse and the next the first point he is making is that it doesn't matter *who* did the baptizing—and that it did not require “apostolic hands” to administer it (*Hays*). No disruptive faction can possibly form around those baptized by Paul because he baptized so few.

- Crispus: certainly the former leader of the Jewish synagogue that we read of in Acts 18.

Read Acts 18:8.

- Gaius: a common name at the time; since Paul wrote the letter to the Romans while in Corinth, this may be the one who hosted him while there.

Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. (Romans 16:23a)

v15

Why did he thank God that he baptized so few?

so that no one would say you were baptized in [lit., into] my name.

As already mentioned, so that no schism for dividing the church could claim him as their leader. David Garland points out another possible reason, based on a passage in the third chapter.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:5-7.

Garland: Some plant, some water, others harvest. All these workers are interchangeable, but none are interchangeable with Christ or separable from Him.

Like Moses, we are all servants (better translation: slaves) in the house—the church. We may even be, on an earthly level, important; Moses was certainly an important cog in God's economy. But not one of us is more important than Christ. We participate, we employ our gifts, we serve faithfully—but not one of us is the Head; not one of us is required for the whole thing to hold together. That would be Christ Jesus, Son of God.

v16

God's word is so real, so transparent with the characters on its pages. We can almost see the apostle pausing in his dictation, scratching his head, and saying, *Oh yeah, I almost forgot, I did baptize Stephanas' family—but I can't think of anyone else right at the moment.*

Read v16.

Sidebar: This reference to the “household” of Stephanas is one of the passages, among others, on which individuals such as the late R. C. Sproul base their position on infant baptism. For they claim that the Greek behind the word translated “household” (*oikos*) would include not just adults in the household (or dwelling, or family) but children and infants as well. Not for *salvation*, but for their inclusion in “the visible covenant community.”

As to who Stephanas was, we glean that information from Paul's closing remarks near the end of the letter.

Read 1 Corinthians 16:15-16.

Apparently that family head, as well as the rest in the family unit (including slaves), was the first convert in the Achaian region ([Corinth, Athens in the southern, Achaian, region](#); [Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea in the northern, Macedonian, region](#)).

And he was probably in the group that came to Paul in Ephesus, delivering the letter and other information to him regarding the state of things in Corinth.

v17A

In v17 Paul artfully segues from the subject of baptism to the issues that will predominate in the following chapters: his role as a preacher of the gospel, and the difference between human wisdom and the wisdom of the cross. In this session we will look at just the first part of the verse.

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel

Saul of Tarsus is a spiritual descendant of Isaiah son of Amoz, in that each was "sent" by God personally—in Saul's case, by Jesus the Christ—to perform a specific task.

Read Isaiah 6:8-10.

send = Hebrew *shalah* (shaw-lakh') = to send away, for, or out

In the familiar story from Acts 9, the risen Christ grabs hold of Saul but, in this account, does not tell him specifically what He is sending him to do, but says only, "...get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do." Later, to Ananias the Lord gives more specifics:

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." (Acts 9:15-16)

As Paul relates the incident again in his defense before King Agrippa in Acts 26, he gives a fuller account of what the Lord told Him on that road to Damascus.

Read Acts 26:16-18.

[Back to our text.](#)

That's a pretty good description of "preach[ing] the gospel," as Paul puts it to the Corinthians. Paul does not denigrate baptism, nor its importance in the life of a believer. He is just pointing out that that is not his assigned apostolic role. There were others who could baptize new believers; for that one did not need to be an apostle.

But in that time and place, in the formative years of the church prior to the canon of Scripture being established, one had to be an apostle to faithfully and accurately speak for God and His Christ (*ex cathedra*) before Jews and Gentiles alike.