

“Who Gave You the Right to Baptize?”

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How many times in the New Testament did the Apostle Paul warn churches to be careful of the evil, Roman Empire? Yet, time and again Paul wrote to churches warning them to beware of legalists (Judaizers), supposed fellow people of faith. A team in India take great comfort from those verses. They feel like the verses were written just for them. Here is an example of how modern Judaizers regularly attempt to disrupt the movement.

Ravi* is a simple man. He's dark-skinned, which is looked down upon in Indian culture. He's from a low-caste background, one of the lowest. In the last five years, Ravi became a follower of Jesus. Ravi has never been to Bible College. He has no degree at all. He cannot even read. But, Jesus has changed him and blessed his life, so Ravi shares the news of Jesus with others, making new disciples and baptizing them, and teaching them how to be the church.

One day, Ravi was at a river in north India with a group of new disciples, baptizing them. It so happens that on that particular day, a traditional, paid pastor named Chand* was visiting the same village. Chand came to the water's edge and disrupted the proceedings. "Get out of the water! Come here. Who gave you the right to baptize? Are you a member of any official organization? You are not ordained?! You should not be doing this!" He was deeply offended that Ravi dared to baptize anyone.

Finally, Chand quieted down, so Ravi spoke, "You have been talking and talking. Now, it's my turn. Pastor, please look at Matthew 28." While Chand looked up the passage, Ravi quoted verses 16-20 from memory. Someone standing nearby had a Hindi Bible. That person read the passage, and then Chand confirmed the Hindi passage with his English Bible. Ravi directed Chand's attention to the fact that Jesus didn't suggest but actually *commanded* His disciples to baptize others. Then, he pointed out that Jesus never limited this command to ordained pastors, bishops, or people who are affiliated with official organizations. Then, Ravi, this illiterate, "backward," humble farmer looked the "important," city-dwelling, college-educated, salaried pastor in the face and said, "So, you go. You leave this place. If you stay, you will only continue speaking bad things, so you must go."

Chand was speechless. He couldn't believe that this illiterate villager had just taught him from the Scriptures. He was captivated. He couldn't leave. He stuck around and watched the baptisms. When it was all done, he told Ravi, "I need to know more about this. I have to know how you know these things." So, Ravi took Chand to meet the man, a fellow lay-leader, who had disciplined him. They spent the day together. Chand was amazed at all he heard, so amazed, in fact, that he went home and resigned from his job with a traditional organization. Why? Here are Chand's own words:

" . . . how many years I've been working with [that mission]. I came from Bible school...[yet] this illiterate guy told me more than I knew in the Bible. Watching [him] do this baptism . . . and . . . his words were so wise; I am the fool. I've been to Bible school, and [my leaders] still won't let me baptize, only the bishop of our organization can baptize! [That organization] gave me a salary, but no authority [to actually do anything]."

Chand is now a fellow laborer in the movement, being trained to walk in authority as Jesus' disciple and to give that authority to others.

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27). Please pray with us that God would raise up more "fools" in India who live out their authority in Jesus!

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