

# 1 Corinthians 1:17

Authorized King James Version (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.

## Analysis

**For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel** (ou gar apesteilen me Christos baptizein alla euangelizesthai, οὐ γὰρ ἀπέστειλέν με Χριστὸς βαπτίζειν ἀλλὰ εὐαγγελίζεσθαι)—Paul clarifies his primary mission: gospel proclamation, not administering ordinances. This does not diminish baptism—Jesus commanded it (Matt 28:19)—but establishes a hierarchy of priorities. The gospel message is foundational; baptism follows as response and public identification. Paul's calling was specifically evangelistic and church-planting; others could handle baptisms.

**Not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect** (ouk en sophia logou, hina me kenōthē ho stauros tou Christou, οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου, ἵνα μὴ κενωθῇ ὁ σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ)—This introduces the central theme of chapters 1-2: the contrast between worldly wisdom and the cross. Sophia logou (σοφία λόγου, "wisdom of speech") refers to the sophisticated rhetoric prized in Corinth. The verb kenoō (κενόω, "to empty, make void, nullify") warns that eloquent philosophy can gut the gospel of its power. The cross is inherently offensive; dressing it up in impressive rhetoric domesticates it, making it palatable but powerless.

## Historical Context

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Corinth was a center of sophistry—professional orators who dazzled audiences with rhetorical skill. Sophists charged high fees and competed for students, fame, and patronage. Some Corinthians wanted their preachers to match this eloquence. Paul refuses: the gospel's power lies in its scandalous content (a crucified Messiah), not in clever presentation. Polished rhetoric might attract crowds but would obscure the gospel's offense and glory.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

**Psalms 19:1** — Heavens declare God's glory

## Study Questions

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1. What is the proper relationship between gospel proclamation and the administration of ordinances like baptism?
2. How can "wisdom of words" (eloquent preaching, sophisticated theology) inadvertently empty the cross of its power?
3. In what ways do modern preachers sometimes prioritize rhetorical skill, entertainment, or intellectual sophistication over the simple gospel?

## Interlinear Text

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οὐκ γὰρ ἀπέστειλέν με Χριστοῦ βαπτίζειν ἀλλ'  
**not For sent me Christ to baptize but**  
G3756 G1063 G649 G3165 G5547 G907 G235

εὐαγγελίζεσθαι οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου ἵνα μὴ  
**to preach the gospel not with wisdom of words** G2443 G3361  
G2097 G3756 G1722 G4678 G3056

κενωθῇ ὁ σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ  
**should be made of none effect the cross Christ**  
G2758 G3588 G4716 G3588 G5547

## Additional Cross-References

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**1 Corinthians 2:1** (Parallel theme): And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

**1 Corinthians 2:13** (Word): Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

**2 Peter 1:16** (Creation): For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

**2 Corinthians 10:10** (Parallel theme): For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.

**John 4:2** (Baptism): (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,)

**2 Corinthians 4:2** (Word): But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

**2 Corinthians 11:6** (Creation): But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things.

**Acts 10:48** (Baptism): And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

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