

**Text: 1 Co 1.26-2.5**

As we move through Corinthians, we will keep our place by developing the broad outline we started with.

**I. Introduction (1.1-9)****II. Conditions reported to Paul (1.10-6.20)****A. Divisions in the church (1.10-4.21)**

<sup>1</sup> Cor 1.11 For I have been **informed** concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you.

**Divisions Revealed (10-12)****Paul's Opening Apologetic (13-17)****The Gospel vs. Wisdom (1.18-2.5)***Section 1: the cross vs. human wisdom (18-25)***Review:**

As Corinthians opens, Paul addresses divisions in the Corinthian church.

- The Corinthians were emphasizing their own sense of superiority by promoting their “favorite leaders.”
- Paul minimized his own importance, rejoicing that he had personally baptized comparatively few of them.
- Paul pointed out that his mission was to preach the gospel, not the “wisdom of words” (17)

**Last week:**

In 1 Cor 1.18-25, Paul contrasts human wisdom with the cross of Christ.

1. What wisdom did the Jews seek? **Impressive signs (especially signs of kingship)**
2. What wisdom did Gentiles seek? **Impressive insights of human philosophers**
3. What did Paul offer in his preaching? **Redemption through a man executed on a cross**

**Bonus question:** How is this discussion of wisdom related to the divisions in Corinth? **The Corinthians were approaching Christianity like Gentiles, treating it as competing philosophies of various teachers, feeding their own pride by their allegiance to “the best” of them**

### Section 2: the world's view of believers (26-31)

What terms does Paul use to describe the believers of Corinth? **Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, foolish things, weak things, base things, the despised, and things that are not**

What two purposes does Paul list for choosing *mostly* the weak and foolish for redemption? (28b, 29)

1. **To nullify the things that are (that is, the high and mighty of our world)**
2. **To allow no one to boast before God: salvation is by grace, not greatness**

Where should Christians direct their boasting? (30-31) **In their Lord, Jesus Christ**

Compare God's choice of Israel and the teaching of Jesus and James:

Dt 7.7 “The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,

Mt 11.25 ¶ At that time Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.

Jas 2.5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

### *Observations:*

Most churches are full of “average” people. Sometimes God brings well-educated, even wealthy people into the church, but most of the people are not “movers and shakers” in society. Jesus said it was *hard* for a rich man to enter the kingdom (not impossible, but hard).

The issue Paul is addressing isn't just the divisions, but the pride the people are taking for themselves in having chosen the "right" leader to follow. The church isn't supposed to function to puff up its people with pride. We need to learn to glory only in our Lord Jesus who gives all of us gifts with which to serve him.

"It is not that God cannot, or will not, save the affluent. But for Paul the glory of the gospel does not lie there; rather, it lies in his mercy toward the very people whom most of the affluent tend to write off — the foolish, the weak, the despised."<sup>1</sup>

### Section 3: the powerful effect of Paul's preaching (2.1-5)

How did Paul describe his own ministry in Corinth?

Not (2.1): **With superiority of speech or wisdom (like the travelling rhetors)**

Instead with (2.2-4): **weakness and trembling as he purposed only to know Christ and demonstrate the Spirit and God's power**

**What do you think?** Do you think Paul's speaking was poor? What do you think Paul meant by saying his speech was not with superiority of speech?

**Various answers**

Note: some people think Paul is referring to preaching when he was first in Corinth while suffering from an illness (compare the "thorn in the flesh" — 2 Cor 12.7). This is uncertain but would underscore the point Paul is making: the message has the power, not the messenger.

What happened because of Paul's preaching? (2.5) **Their faith didn't rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God**

**Observations:**

1. One important consequence of salvation is humility: none of us can save ourselves.
2. Humility should produce: love for the brethren (we are all in the same boat); and outreach to *anyone* — everyone needs to hear the gospel

<sup>1</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 87.

3. We should view divisions among us as a serious concern and do everything we can to eliminate any that occur, even by our own surrender of our desires. (Compare 1 Cor 6 where Paul counsels suffering a financial loss rather than taking a brother to court.)
4. We shouldn't build churches on personality (the dynamism of the preacher), but on Christ and his message.
5. We shouldn't use this teaching as an excuse to value lazy preachers who won't do their best to speak as well as they can (through the grace of God).

"Those who seek wisdom may sound as if they are involved in a noble affair; in reality they are engaged in various forms of self-congratulatory, and therefore divisive, competition over 'excellence' of speech, rhetoric, or profundity."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Fee, 91.