

INTRODUCTION

Having said in **verse 17** that he will not *preach the gospel with wisdom of words lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect*, the apostle Paul then proceeds, from **verse 18** onwards, to explain how that can happen and why he took that position. In fact, the message (word) of the Cross (**v18**) is set up in contrast to the word of wisdom (**v17**) throughout the entire passage!

The root word *sophos/sophia* (translated as wise/wisdom) occurs about 15 times in these 19 verses. It appears that Paul is addressing a popular slogan from Corinth, an obsession of some of the Corinthian Christians then! (*Obsession with wisdom, the world's wisdom!!*)

This obsession with wisdom, desire to go for an alternative wisdom, traces its roots all the way back to the Garden of Eden: *Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. (**Genesis 3:4-6**)*

As God's children living in Corinth then, these Corinthian Christians should know better. Sadly, they have gotten themselves all entangled in this foolish pursuit of the world's wisdom while ignoring the true and divine wisdom that is before them! Therefore in these 19 verses, Paul will talk about the wise folly of God and the strong weakness of God, the strangeness of God's choice and God's method in bringing glory to Himself! Values are indeed reversed because God's ways are not men's ways!

These 19 verses can be sub-divided into 3 sections: **1:18-25**, **1:26-31** and **2:1-5**. We will

- (i) Take time to understand the message of each section
- (ii) See how each section is related to each other
- (iii) Appreciate how the overall message of this passage is connected to **1:10-17** and the problem of faction highlighted there.

1:18-25

These questions are meant to help us get the main message of this section.

Discuss:

- What's the message of the Cross? How and why is it foolishness to some people?
What and how does our attitude to this message reveal our spiritual state?
- Read vv19-21. What's the point Paul is making here? **Verse 19** is a quotation from? What was the context then?
- The Jews request a sign -- what does this mean? The Greeks seek after wisdom -- what does this mean? What's wrong with their approach? How is 'Christ crucified' a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks?
- Why is it that some Jews and some Greeks believe the message of the Cross? What's so special about them? What makes them different?

- How is the message of the Cross (Christ) the wisdom of God and the power of God (**v18, 24**)? How does this demonstrate 'the foolishness of God is wiser than men'?

Ponder:

- What's the message of this section?

1:26-31

These questions are meant to help us get the main message of this section.

Discuss:

- What is Paul asking the Corinthian Christians to do in **verse 26**? What's so special / unique about God's choice? What does it reveal?

- What's the reason for God to act in this way?
- What's the significance of the phrases 'according to the flesh' (v26) and 'of the world' (v27, 28)?
- What is Paul seeking to convey in **verse 30**? What does it mean to glory in the LORD?

Ponder:

- What's the message of this section?

2:1-5

These questions are meant to help us get the main message of this section.

Discuss:

- In these 5 verses, Paul focuses on his preaching among the Corinthians when he first visited them. What was his message? How did he preach? Did he choose to preach in this manner deliberately or was he forced by his circumstances to do it?
- What was the result of such preaching? What did it demonstrate?
- Paul said in **verse 3** that he was with them in weakness, fear and much trembling. Why is this so?
- In **verse 4**, Paul contrasted two ways of preaching? What are they? Why did he choose to preach in the second way? What's the goal that he had in mind to achieve?

Ponder:

- What's the message of this section?

CONCLUSION

- Review your “What's the message of this section” for each of the three sections above. Now answer:

What's the connection between them? (In other words, is there any overall theme for these 3 sections? If yes, what is it?)

- What's the connection between the message of **1:18-2:5** and the message of **1:10-17**?