

**1201 Working with God to have life, faithfulness and judgment, and power - 1Co(3)1-(4)21
(by Whirlwind)**

Let us first look at the church in Corinth. Although they had spiritual gifts at that time, they were still carnal; we cannot use spiritual gifts to judge whether a person is spiritual. Second, the text addresses how we are to work together with God to build up our own lives. Third, it discusses how Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, citing Scripture to illustrate that God's promise is "once saved, always saved," though people can forfeit it on their own. Fourth, it mentions that God's stewards must be faithful, pointing out two instances where the Chinese Union Version translates the term as "judge with condemnation" when it should be "judgment," and how some churches use this erroneous translation to morally coerce believers. Fifth, it discusses how the Apostle Paul was still regarded by the world as filth and refuse at that time, noting that God made the apostles a spectacle for both humans and angels to observe. Finally, it addresses the fact that the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power, and highlights the repentance of the Corinthian church.

Please note that this article is an expansion of the topicwise Bible study held on Sunday (8/2/26). Unless otherwise specified, verses refer to those in NASB95. If this article refers previous articles, they can all be found on our website, '<https://a-christian-voice.com/>'; click on 'Understanding Spiritual Life'.

1. Although the church in Corinth had spiritual gifts at that time, it was still carnal

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?"(1 Corinthians 3:1-4)

Paul was deeply disappointed with the church in Corinth at that time. He knew they had been called and were full of gifts (see 1 Corinthians 1:7), yet they had not embarked on the path of sanctification and remained "...as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ."(1 Corinthians 3:1) For "...solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."(Hebrews 5:14) That is why this passage says, "...Indeed, even now you are not yet able."(1 Corinthians 3:2) If a person walks the path of sanctification, their life will gradually change, and they will eventually reach maturity. This shows that a person can be full of gifts without having walked the path of sanctification, and it also shows that we cannot use gifts to judge whether a person is spiritual; miracles and wonders are meant to testify the word of His grace (cf. Acts 14:3).

They were carnal, acting like the world—filled with jealousy and strife. He also reiterated their factionalism, so Paul knew they were still unable to partake of solid food. In this state, it is impossible to be united with Christ—that is, it is impossible to "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose."(Philippians 2:2) If each of us could be united with Christ—possessing the same

mind, love, and heart as Christ—we would naturally achieve true unity. This would not be the superficial unity pursued by many churches; therefore, growing in life to attain union with Christ is what we should truly pursue.

2. Working together with God to have our lives

"What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."(1 Corinthians 3:5-15)

It is made clear from the very beginning that life can come only from God, that is, "...but God who causes the growth."(1 Corinthians 3:7) And also know this: "...I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."(John 10:10) Notice that there is only one foundation for receiving life as the verse says: "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."(1 Corinthians 3:11)

Paul was very clear that his role was merely that of a wise master builder, laying the foundation for others, after which they would build the house in partnership with God. However, each person must be careful about how they build upon it, for the reward is given according to their own work. Works made of wood, hay, and straw will be burned up by the fire, while only works of gold, silver, and precious stones—which will receive a reward—will remain. But even if a person's work is burned up, he himself will be saved—though only with loss. In other words, God's promise is "once saved, always saved," but a person can forfeit it—and worse still, he may not even realize he has forfeited it, thinking he has done many good works. Take the church in Laodicea, for example: they shut Jesus out without even knowing it (see Revelation 3:14-20).

An example of willful disobedience is the man named Demas, who was originally a fellow worker with Paul (see Colossians 4:14, Philemon 1:24), but "for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; ..." (2 Timothy 4:10). This was his own choice. For Demas, the Scripture is very clear: "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. For ground that drinks the

rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned."(Hebrews 6:4-8)

3. Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them

"Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless." So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God."(1 Corinthians 3:16-23)

This passage makes it very clear that all Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. But please note that it says "If any man"—which clearly excludes Satan and his servants, for they have always sought to destroy God's temple. Please also note that God is not saying here that He will destroy a person simply because they knowingly and willfully destroy His temple once, for "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."(1 John 1:9) Rather, He will inevitably punish such actions, such as by permitting attacks from Satan's servants.

The text then explains the difference between worldly wisdom and wisdom from above: as the result, "So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you."(1 Corinthians 3:21) Indeed, all things belong to Christians, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, ..." (Colossians 2:9-10) This essentially means that a spiritual person will truly understand what Paul said: "If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know."(1 Corinthians 8:2) So here it also says, "whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God."(1 Corinthians 3:22-23) In other words, we must be in Christ.

4. God's stewards must be faithful

"Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants (G5257, officer, minister, servant) of Christ and stewards (G3623, appearing 10 times) of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined (G350, judged) by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine (G350) myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines (G350) me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment (G2919, judge, verb) before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both

bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God."(1 Corinthians 4:1-5)

Paul made it clear from the very beginning that his role was that of a servant and a steward, and God's requirement of a steward is faithfulness—which he indeed fulfilled: "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ."(Galatians 1:10)

Please note that the word "servant (G5257, officer, minister, servant) used here appears 20 times in total; its specific meaning depends on the context. Here, it aligns with the meaning of this passage: "But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister (G5257) and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you."(Acts 26:16)

Then it says that Paul himself does not judge himself, let alone others. Please note that the word G530 carries absolutely no connotation of judgment with condemnation; it appears 18 times. Let us first examine these passages: "Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined (G530) Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him."(Luke 23:13-14) How could this word possibly mean "to judge with condemnation" as translated by Chinese Union Version? In the five instances where it appears in the Book of Acts, it always means "to examine," as in: "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining (G530) the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."(Acts 17:11) By the way, in the time of the Book of Acts, the Scriptures referred to the Old Testament, but Christians believe that both the Old and New Testaments are to be examined. The remaining passages are all in the Book of 1 Corinthians, and they essentially also mean "to judge."

Let's look at another instance where this word is translated as "judge" (G2919); it also means "to discern," not "to judge with condemnation." In fact, the word "judge by condemnation " is often used by some Chinese church as an excuse for moral blackmail, because the Chinese Union Version translation of this passage reads, "Do not judge with condemnation (G2919) others, lest you be judged with condemnation (G2919). For in the same way you judge with condemnation (G2919) others, you will be judged with condemnation (G2919); and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Matthew 7:1-2, direct translation from Union Version) In particular, the following verses say, "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye?"(Matthew 7:3-4)

Based on this, some churches often accuse those who offer constructive criticism of "judging with condemnation" others, thereby silencing them to make management easier. However, they fail to notice that the following verses clearly specify the type of person being addressed: "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear

you to pieces."(Matthew 7:5-6) It really never occurred to those people that they themselves often lack an ear that can hear, one capable of correctly understanding the words of Scripture. Especially when using the phrase that follows the above passage to say, in God's name, that a brother is worse than a dog or a pig—that is cursing another person. This word does not carry the meaning of judgment with condemnation, as is made very clear in the following passage: Jesus said, "But even if I do judge (G2919), My judgment (G2920, noun) is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and the Father who sent Me."(John 8:16) The conclusion is simple: this word carries absolutely no connotation of judgment with condemnation.

Let's look at another passage: "But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern (G1253) good and evil."(Hebrews 5:14) How can one discern without judgment? Some might think this seems to contradict what is said in 1 Corinthians 4:5. But the key point here is that when the Lord comes, He will bring to light the secret things hidden in everyone's hearts, "For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night."(1 Thessalonians 5:2) Since we do not know when the Lord will come, we must continue to work together with God and do what we ought to do even when He has not yet come.

5. At that time, the Apostle Paul was still regarded by the world as filth and refuse

"Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn (G3129) not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you. For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now."(1 Corinthians 4:6-13)

First, please note that the word "learn" (G3129) by some translated as "imitate" and it appears 31 times. None of these instances refer merely to "imitating" in the general sense; rather, they speak of true learning, because imitation can be either internal or external, whereas true learning encompasses both. Here, Paul is urging them to learn from him and the other apostles, strictly adhering to what is written in Scripture. He tells them not to boast about what they have received and warns them not to think they have already become kings! The Apostle Paul put it this way: "For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men."(1 Corinthians 4:9) Please note that this was merely Paul's perception, but the reality was indeed so. He openly declared his willingness to die for the Lord, as in this passage: "Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I

am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.””(Acts 21:13) His entire life truly became a spectacle for both people and angels to behold.

After he was saved in the blinding light, the Lord told him certain things through Ananias: "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) He knew in advance that he would suffer for the Lord, but this did not deter him, right up until he was martyred for the Lord.

Look, the verses followed give some examples to illustrate that at that time he was indeed regarded by the world as filth and refuse, which is essentially consistent with the passage below. "Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?"(2 Corinthians 11:23-29) He would not shrink back because of these sufferings.

The Lord "...has said to me (Paul), “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” ..."(2 Corinthians 12:9) "...Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."(2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

6. For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power

"I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I exhort you, be imitators (G3402, follower) of me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power. What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?"(1 Corinthians 4:14-21)

Paul stated right from the start that the purpose of his letter was to act as a spiritual father to the church in Corinth: "Therefore I exhort you, be imitators (G3402, follower) of

me."(1 Corinthians 4:16) The term "imitators" here refers to being a follower, just as he later said, "Be imitators (G3402, follower) of me, just as I also am of Christ."

(1 Corinthians 11:1) As we have emphasized before, the term "imitate" in Chinese may refer only to outward imitation, not necessarily inward. Therefore, the original text compiled here uses the word "follow." Thus, this is not saying to imitate Paul as a person, but rather to follow the Lord just as he followed the Lord.

He then explains the reason for sending Timothy, his son in the Lord: "...he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church."(1 Corinthians 4:17) In the end, he found that this was the right course of action, because the church in Corinth later repented, just as the Scripture says: "I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter."(2 Corinthians 7:9-11) Of course, this comes later.

Notice what he says: "But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, ..." (1 Corinthians 4:19) So he was constantly observing how the Holy Spirit was leading him—including the degree of freedom the Holy Spirit granted him—and within that freedom, he always made decisions that aligned with God's will. He knew very clearly that, "...the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power."(1 Corinthians 4:20) He gave them a choice, saying, "What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?"(1 Corinthians 4:21) We are delighted to know that, just as the scripture quoted earlier says, they chose the latter and repented.