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1 Corinthians

Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,... 1 Corinthians 3:12

Paul has been speaking of his laying the foundation at Corinth, the foundation which is Jesus Christ. In time, others like Apollos, had or would come to build upon that message he proclaimed. It is to their work that Paul now directs his attention. He begins with "Now if anyone builds on this foundation..." Again, the foundation is Christ Jesus.

In time, teachers will come and present their words and doctrine concerning Christ. Some will be well-trained, some will be not-so-well trained. Some may be opportunists (Philippians 1:15-18), some may be so far out in left-field that they completely botch their presentation of Christ. However, all are building "on this foundation." This implies that they are true believers and not heretics proclaiming a false gospel. They *are* building on the foundation of Christ.

With this in mind, Paul gives six possibilities for their proclamation. In successive order he begins with the most precious and enduring and ends with the least. In each there is a quality that will be measured by a trial. This trial will be seen in the verses ahead. How that quality stands up to the trial is what his words are directed to. But until we arrive there, we can discern a few things about what has been presented. As we look at their qualities, think of them as a sermon, a teaching on doctrine, or the work of someone within the church (even the person in the pew who shares the simple gospel):

- 1) The first two are metals. They are strong and enduring. They will stand up to heat, constant use, time, the elements, quality tests, molding for specific occasions, etc. They serve multi-purposes, are beautiful, and are treasured by those who own them and those who use them. They are more uncommon than any of the following things. It usually takes much effort to obtain them as they are hidden in the ground or in otherwise hard to access places. They must be refined in order to remove impurities and the refining process can continue to improve them until the metal is of the finest quality of all. When they are so refined, they reflect back the beauty of the beholder perfectly.

- 2) The third, precious stones, are beautiful. They will stand up to heat, they often become more lustrous through constant use (polishing them), or they can be marred and chipped through over-use. They can withstand the elements very well. They cannot be molded, but are fixed in their make up. Depending on what stone, they may be suited to multi-purposes, but not all are. They are treasured by those who possess them and are a delight to the eyes of those who see them. Depending on the type of stone, it may be difficult to find, or it may be easy to remove from an outcropping of such stones and surrounding material. They do not need to be refined as much as they need to be shaped and polished for maximum luster. When they are so polished, they will often radiate the glory of light through them in a dazzling array of colors.

- 3) The fourth, wood, is more common than the first three, but there are many types of wood and some are rarer than others. Each wood is suitable for different uses. They will not stand up to high heat well, but some can stand up to the elements better than others. They can be cut and formed into an unlimited number of shapes. They can be left coarse or polished to an immensely high luster. With a protective coating, they can shine like precious stones. Most woods are easy to obtain and work with. They can be plain to the eye, radiantly adorned with knots or grain, or they can be astonishingly beautiful in natural color with even little grain being noticed. Other than the wood itself, much of what it entails when added into a building is of human effort and shaping. In the end, very few woods last for many ages but eventually degrade over time.

4) The last two, hay and straw, are actually used as building materials, but they are temporary and will not stand up to any excessive heat. Instead they will quickly burn up. The elements will degrade them, they can be easily molded into shapes, even twisted in an unnatural way in order to be used. In and of themselves, they don't really leave anything to stir either the imagination or please the eye, but if twisted and contorted, they can be woven into marvelously beautiful patterns which direct our attention toward them. Such patterns though are only the result of man's efforts and were not inherently a part of their make up. Other than very limited and often showy, temporary uses, they are not good for building on a solid foundation.

Life application: In evaluating the elements described above, remember that the qualities of them are being used by Paul in a metaphorical way to describe what we as servants of the Lord either add to the foundation or enjoy once they are added to the foundation. Everything we do for the Lord, or enjoy concerning the Lord (such as a particular form of worship or type of sermon) is considered an addition to the foundation. But every addition will be tested for value and endurance. Let us add wisely.

...each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

1 Corinthians 3:13

Paul is now speaking of anyone who builds on the foundation, which is Christ. Therefore, as noted in the preceding verse, he is speaking of saved believers regardless of the soundness of their work. Having noted six different metaphors concerning their work, he now says that "each one's work will become clear." Those people who teach incorrectly will be shown where their faults were; those who taught what is right and in accord with sound doctrine will likewise be so informed.

A great example of what Paul is speaking of today is how modern Israel is perceived. The doctrine of dispensationalism teaches that despite being out of God's favor due to their rejection of Christ, Israel's time of punishment will end

and Christ will return to Israel after the Tribulation period refines them. From Jerusalem, and in the midst of His people Israel, He will reign for a thousand years.

Reformed theologians, for the most part, dismiss this and believe that the church has replaced Israel. To them, the 1000-year reign of Christ mentioned in Revelation is merely symbolic of the entire church age; not a literal time-frame, but simply a number which represents "fullness."

Both of these cannot be right. Both sides truly believe they are correct and they find the opposing view incredible to even contemplate. In the end, proponents of both views will stand before the Lord and this, along with all their other correct or incorrect doctrine, will be evaluated. At that time "the Day will declare it." This means that when the judgment of believers for rewards and losses are handed out, in that Day, the declaration for right doctrine will be proclaimed and the declaration for the faulty will also be called out.

Paul says that the reason it will occur is "because it will be revealed by fire." In Revelation 2:18, we read this comment about the Lord -

"These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass."

The "eyes like a flame of fire" speak of His ability to seek out and determine all things, burning away that which is of no value. The "feet like fine brass" speaks of judgment. It is at the Judgment Seat of Christ that the evaluation of each man's efforts will be made. He alone will determine the truth of matters such as dispensationalism by "the fire" which "will test each one's work, of what sort it is."

The marvelous thing about Christ's judgment is that it will be perfectly fair and it will be perfectly just. No soul will come before Him for judgment and leave feeling

as if he had received unfair treatment. Instead, he will realize the error of his faults. Another beautiful aspect of what is involved in this judgment is the fact that we were given, in advance, the necessary tools to determine what our judgment will be!

In the giving of the Bible, we have been handed His instruction manual for life, doctrine, and practice. It is up to us to rationally, fairly, and competently evaluate those doctrines which are presented and then to reject those which are faulty. In the end, we can be as right as we want or as wrong as we want. We can pray about, study, meditate on, and proclaim God's word competently, or we can trust other's findings and hope they were right.

Of what eternal value is sitting on the computer playing games, watching an endless succession of television shows, or heading out to the mall day after day for shopping? And yet, we pursue these at the expense of right doctrine! Let us be prepared at our judgment, which is coming, for that which lasts.

Life application: How sure are you about which type of baptism is correct? Are you trusting the Bible or tradition? If the Bible, are you properly evaluating baptism's symbolism and purpose? This is one of a zillion things that you will be evaluated on. Read, study, be approved!

If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward.

1 Corinthians 3:14

Paul has been speaking of the building of the church upon the foundation, which is Christ Jesus. He noted six different materials of varying quality which one could use to continue the building process and then he noted that whatever we use, something of value or something worthless, it will be seen for what it truly is in the end.

Now he notes that "if anyone's work which he has built on it endures..." Obviously, those more valuable and lasting materials will endure while those of lesser quality won't. Using these metaphors, he is certainly speaking primarily of teachers, preachers, and ministers who take and build upon the foundation. However, could it not be said of the mother who sits with and instructs her children on Christ? Could this same principle not be applied to the cashier behind the counter who takes time to tell about the Lord who saved her? And could it not be applied to the electrician who speaks to his fellow workers about Christ?

Each of these examples are people who are building upon the foundation. Their knowledge may be less than trained teachers, but it may actually be of better quality. One does not have to be a theologian to get the principle tenets of the faith right and then to properly repeat them to others. Even a person who is confined to a wheel chair and has no other ministry than posting on Facebook or doing other internet work can build upon the foundation.

No one is truly exempt from participating in the work for Christ and each has a role that can and should be filled. As long as the words are correct and correspond to the doctrines of the Bible, it will endure. And if it endures, "he will receive a reward."

Christians are saved by grace through faith. It is a done deal and it is a guarantee. What occurs after salvation is up to the individual. Those things that we do, be they many or be they few, are to be of the highest quality if they are to be rewarded. Let us, therefore, endeavor to hold fast to the principle tenets of the faith and thus bring glory to God, And we can do so in the hopes of a reward from our gracious Lord.

Life application: You are a minister of the gospel to those around you. Fulfill your commission to the best of your ability and be pleased to do it... the rewards are heavenly.

If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. 1 Corinthians 3:15

Paul, speaking of the quality of work which is built upon the foundation of Christ, gives us direct and exacting insights into what will happen when we face Jesus. To understand the timing, one needs to understand the sequence of events concerning church-age believers as the Bible lays them out. First, we are saved at some point in our lives and sealed with the Holy Spirit - our guarantee of eternal life from that moment on. We can never lose this status. From the moment of our salvation, everything we do will be a part of our judgment before Jesus. It is our choice how we build upon the foundation.

Eventually, we die and await our call to glory. Or, if we are those left alive at the coming of the Lord (the moment known as the rapture), we will be translated to be with Him forever. After our translation from the earthly to the spiritual, we must then face our trial for the things we have done in our lives since coming to Christ. This is known as the judgment seat of Christ and it is detailed for us in 2 Corinthians 5:9-11 -

"Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences."

This is the biblical sequence of events for the saved believer. There is no such concept as "purgatory" as taught by the Roman Catholic Church. It is a made-up lie which was inculcated into their teachings for financial profit and as a tool to keep congregants in bondage. There is also no such thing as "loss of salvation" as taught by those who follow the doctrine of Arminius or other such teachers. There is eternal security in the Lord, but there is the sure coming judgment for the life we lived in Him.

And this judgment is explained clearly here. Remembering that Paul has already described our works as gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw will help us to understand our judgment before Christ. He says, "if anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss." Fire merely refines (or has no effect) on the first three types of work. However, it will consume the last three depending on its amount of heat and duration. Wood may make it through a temporary fire, but it will be marred. The final two will certainly be burned up.

Paul's words then are a metaphor not for condemnation, but for purification. The term *mulct* is a good description of what will occur at this judgment. To mulct means "to penalize by fining or demanding forfeiture." The things we could have enjoyed in our eternal state will be lessened if our works don't pass muster. If they do, we will receive our reward for them. In the end, all will be completely satisfied with the results because they will be based on the choices we made. There will be no impartiality nor unfairness in what occurs.

Whatever cannot withstand the judgment will certainly be burned away. However, despite this scary sentiment, Paul next gives words of a most blessed assurance. Each person will be judged and face whatever loss is due, "but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." The meaning of this is perfectly clear and only someone with a perverse agenda could come to any other conclusion than that this is a judgment solely for rewards and losses, but not condemnation - "he himself will be saved." The immense grace and mercy of Christ means that even a person who has done absolutely nothing for Him after salvation will continue on in his saved state forever.

However, he will bear the sadness of having lived a life which could have done so much more. He will be saved "as through fire." When one is pulled alive from a burning house, they may bear the pains of the ordeal, the smell of the ordeal, and the sad memories of it as well, but they will be saved.

Life application: The wise soul will take 1 Corinthians 3:15 to heart and will endeavor to work for eternal rewards, putting aside that which is earthly, temporary, and destined to perish. The smell of the smoke at the judgment for such an ill-used life may linger for all eternity.