

1Co07 – Is My Work Fuel For The Fire? – 1 Corinthians 3:10-15
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Open your Bibles. Title of the message, “Is My Work Fuel For The Fire?” We’re in 1 Corinthians Chapter 3:10-15.

We started Chapter 3 with the message “Carnal Christians in Diapers” looking at the two problems of “worldly thinking” and “spiritual immaturity.” Then last week, also in Chapter 3, we saw what those problems lead to and in that message we skipped over the middle section in 1 Corinthians Chapter 3 and I said we’d come back and look at it in detail today. And so that is what we’re going to do.

Let’s pray. *Lord Jesus, we can’t dive in without you. We can’t move without you and we certainly can’t hear from you without you. We can’t hear your Word without you. And so, Lord, we pray as we turn to your Word that you would speak. Word of God – speak. Open our eyes. Give us understanding and give us application of this message to our lives. For your glory and in your name, Jesus, amen.*

Here is the statement that drives this entire message. It may not make complete sense now, but prayerfully it will before we are finished.

Our work in the flesh – is fuel for the fire.
Our surrender to the Spirit – is sure reward.

In the message last week Paul made it clear (verse 5) he and Apollos were only God’s “servants at work” doing what the Lord had given them to do. And in verse 7 he said it’s not important *who* does *what* work, the only thing that is important is that God alone brings growth in a believer and in a church.

Then in verse 8 we got a hint of the transition into our focus today.

1 Corinthians 3:8 (NLT)

8 The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose (God’s purpose). And both will be rewarded for their own hard work.

Today Paul is going to expand that truth of reward and loss that we will experience from serving the Lord as part of the Church.

Now we know “the Church” is not a physical building and “the Church” is definitely not any single religion or denomination. “The Church” is the EKKLESIA (in Greek) – “*The called out ones.*” The Church is all those who have truly surrendered their lives to Jesus

Christ – who serve and follow him as Lord. And one of the metaphors for “the called out ones” (the Church) is The Temple of God – referring to a living, spiritual building.

We read it last week, just down in 1 Corinthians 3:16.

1 Corinthians 3:16 (NLT)

16 Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?

The word used for “temple” here is referring to the *Holy of Holies* where the *presence of God* dwells. Which is why Paul says the Spirit of God *lives in us* making us BOTH individually and together the living Temple of God. We are living stones being built together into the spiritual Temple of God.

Write down 1 Peter 2:4-5.

1 Peter 2:4–5 (NLT)

4 You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple . . . 5 And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple . . .

Begin to see the weight of that – we are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple.

Write down Ephesians 2:21.

Ephesians 2:21 (NLT)

21 We are carefully joined together in him(Christ), becoming a holy temple for the Lord.

We've got to grasp the importance of the fact that we, together, are God's holy, spiritual temple, God's “living building” and it is that metaphor (we are God's living, spiritual temple) that Paul is using in our text today.

At the end of 1 Corinthians 3:9 Paul switches abruptly from the field metaphor to the building metaphor and then we begin today in 1 Corinthians 3:10 (a).

1 Corinthians 3:10(A) (NLT)

10 Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder . . .

God had Paul lay the foundation in the church at Corinth like an expert builder. The phrase “expert builder” is the Greek ARCHITEKTON from which we get our “architect”

the one who “lays out” the foundation of a building for others to build on, which is what the second half of 1 Corinthians 3:10-11 says.

1 Corinthians 3:10-11 (NLT)

*10(Paul says: I laid the foundation, Christ) . . .Now **others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful.***

11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ.

Paul says be very careful because as the NKJ says here, ***For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.***

There is NO foundation for the building up of God’s people *other* than Jesus Christ.

Jesus is **The Only Corner Stone**

Jesus is **The Only Firm Foundation**

Jesus is **The Only Solid Rock** on which the Church is BUILT

and nothing else and no one else can ever form any part of the foundation of God’s Church, amen? No other teachings, ideas, concepts or philosophies... Christ alone is our cornerstone. He alone is our firm foundation. And Paul says those serving God to build up his Church must be very clear on WHO the *only foundation is* and now Paul is going to build on this idea of serving God by building up the Church. And we are going to see *how* each of us who are serving God as part of the Church **will receive the appropriate compensation** (just rewards) **for our own work** which is what Paul said back in verse 8.

Now the specific context of this section in 1 Corinthian is really focused on the teachers and leaders who follow Paul to build on the foundation of Christ that he laid in Corinth. And so this is especially a promise and a warning to those who serve in teaching and leadership roles in the church. In fact, Ephesians 4:12 says it is the teacher’s and leader’s responsibility to equip God’s people so that they can build up the church.

Ephesians 4:12 (NLT)

*12 Their responsibility (teachers and leaders) is to equip **God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.***

So, ultimately this is a word to all believers who serve the Lord in the Church. We taught this same topic in a broader context in our Revelation series (Revelation message #12) called “Judgment, Reward, and Loss” and I would encourage you to watch or listen to that message to dig more into this truth. (You can find it on the Word By Mail phone app or at wordbymail.com.)

Okay, are you ready? This is the core of the message today. I'm going to read this entire paragraph straight through, then we'll come back and "unpack it" as they say.

1 Corinthians 3:12–15 (NLT)

12 Anyone who builds on that foundation (of Jesus Christ) may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw.

13 But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value.

14 If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward.

15 But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames.

Welcome to the Judgment Seat of Christ. In Greek – one word – “BEMA.” The BEMA or Bema seat was a high place built in an open public square where the Roman Magistrate (or highest official) would sit to publically administer justice. And, it was also the place where rewards were handed out to the victor's of sporting events.

The Bema seat was especially famous in Corinth because (as we said in our first message) Corinth was home to the Isthmian Games, which were much like our Olympics and were famous all over Greece. And the Bema seat is where the rewards were handed out at those famous Isthmian Games.

Let me show you (on the wall) an illustration of a Bema seat, and here are the actual remains of the Bema seat in Corinth that Paul was using to paint a vivid picture in these verses.

And so Paul points to the Bema seat in Corinth and says there's one like that in heaven – only heavenly in size and heavenly in glory. And all believers are going to stand there one day with Jesus Christ sitting on that judgment seat. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says at the Bema seat *all believers* will be rightly rewarded for what we have done on this earth – whether of value or of no value.

Again, let me be clear, this Bema seat of Christ is for *believers only*. There will be no unbelievers at this judgment.

Revelation Chapter 20 describes the final judgment for all unbelievers. It's called the Great White Throne Judgment and I pray none of you show up at that final judgment, because that one ends in permanent separation from God. Again, for more detail, get the Revelation #12 message, “Judgment, Rewards and Loss.”

For today, look down at your Bible again at 1 Corinthians 3:12.

1 Corinthians 3:12 (NLT)

12 Anyone who builds (meaning builds up the church) ***on that foundation*** (of Jesus Christ) ***may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw.***

And notice first, there is no mention of *how much is built* and no mention of *how much effort* is put in. It is only *what type of material is used* in the building. And if you look again you'll see there are really two types of material.

One -OF WORTH (Gold, Silver, Jewels) and
One – WORTHLESS (Wood, Hay, Straw)

And I think it's safe to say we will *all* bring some of *both* to this bonfire in heaven. (Hopefully we'll have some of the "worth" anyway.) And why do I say a bonfire in heaven? Because 1 Corinthians 3:13 says,

1 Corinthians 3:13 says (NLT)

13 But on the judgment day, fire will reveal (make known) ***what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work*** (for the Lord) ***has any value.***

It's NOT – DID you Build?

It's NOT – Did you Serve the Lord?

It's NOT – Were you BUSY?

It's – Did your work for the Lord - have ANY true eternal value?

Okay now this is getting serious. Here's what I picture...

I picture that Bema seat image, but heavenly in size and scope and glory with the fully glorified Jesus Christ sitting on the seat and I'm standing in front of the Bema seat and next to me is the *absolute largest pizza oven* you could ever imagine. You know, the one where you put the pizza in raw on one side and it passes through the fire and it comes out cooked on the other side.

Now, I know I am in heaven. I know my sins have been paid for. I know I'm standing in the righteousness of Christ. But now my *work for the Lord* is being loaded into the heavenly pizza oven.

And I'm straining to see down the other end of the oven... *come on... let something come out besides ashes!!*

And then 1 Corinthians 3:14 says,

1 Corinthians 3:14 (NLT)

14 If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward.

Oh yes!!! There it is – at the other end of the fire – a little gold nugget – a silver piece – and a jewel...

Thank you Jesus!! Now I have a crown to cast at your feet with the Church in Revelation Chapter 4 when we are gathered around your throne in worship.

The Bible lists nine types of rewards:

Five types of crowns and

Four types of “other rewards.”

These rewards are real and they are eternal and we will either receive them or suffer the loss of them here – at the judgment seat of Christ.

And what does it mean – *suffer the loss* – I thought this was heaven...

But 1 Corinthians 3:15 says,

1 Corinthians 3:15 (NLT)

15 But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames.

Remember NO SALVATION is lost here. That matter is already settled through your faith in Jesus Christ and there is no punishment for sin here. That punishment has been paid in full by Jesus Christ. So what kind of suffering loss will there be?

Well, I’m not really sure and the Bible doesn’t really say. But can you imagine standing before the glorified Christ there and your life goes into that heavenly testing oven and all of a sudden there’s a huge fire ball that blows out both sides of the oven? And you’re left standing there looking like a chimney sweep from Mary Poppins, covered in the ash and soot that was your life for the Lord.

Yes, you will still be saved. But if I’m standing before Jesus Christ and I realize that my life lived for him *from an eternal perspective* has been worthless – *I will suffer great loss*. But the loss we will feel at the judgment seat will not be at the hands of Jesus. It will be us coming to grips with the worthless parts of our lives as the angels are calling in back-up super-tanker support to help put out the forest fire.

“Uh, yeah, this is Heaven base-station, can you call in that Super-Tanker from Canada, ‘cause we’re gonna need some serious air-support to put this one out, over”

As you're standing there barely escaping the flames created by your service for the Lord going up like a mushroom cloud.

What do we do about this? How can we know whether our effort and our service to the Lord will be burned up in this heavenly fire – or not? Because of time constraints I really can't develop a full answer to that critical question here. So maybe next week we'll look again at this question.

But here is the short answer.

The SPIRIT builds with *Gold, Silver, Jewels*
The FLESH builds with *Wood, Hay, Straw*
and all it takes is a little fire to tell the difference.

In fact, in a way you can see it here on earth when a Christian has to go through the fire here.

Please hear me. If your work for the Lord is fuel for this fire, it's because you are using the logic of the world and the strength of the flesh instead of relying on the power of the Holy Spirit and the life of Jesus Christ living in you.

And if you don't remember anything else about how to prepare for the judgment seat of Christ, remember this. Anything you do for Christ in your *own strength* or for your *own purposes* – will explode like a match to gasoline on that day. And in contrast to that the only things that will become rewards for you are what you have allowed God to do *in you and through you*.

Our rewards are not based on our activity or our effort.
Our rewards are based on the "Christ in us" principle.

In John 15:5 Jesus says,

John 15:5 (ESV)

5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (Meaning nothing of eternal value)

All of our own efforts *in the flesh and without Christ including our religious efforts* will only be used to warm heaven in the oven of this judgment.

So, first and foremost, we must learn to live the “Christ in me” principle, which means first – crucifying self-lordship and then allowing Jesus Christ to live in you, more and more.

As Paul says in Galatians 2:20,

Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

These rewards are not about what you do (in the flesh.) These rewards are about what Jesus Christ does in you and through you for *his glory*.

God prepared you for good works – to bring him glory. Ephesians 2:10 says you are his *workmanship*, his *masterpiece*, his *poiema* created in Christ Jesus for *good works* which God has prepared for you that you should walk in them.

Learning to NOT work *in the flesh* and instead surrender to the *leading of the Spirit* will allow Christ in you to accomplish his work through you. And on that day – you will receive reward instead of suffer loss.

Remember:

Our work in the flesh – is fuel for the fire.

Our surrender to the Spirit – is sure reward.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, we get it as much as we can. We know Lord that there's a day of judgment coming, and we thank you that it is not the Great White Throne judgment, that the judgment upon our sin has already been paid in full, that we stand in your righteousness, that we are already seated in the heavenly places with you, our adoption is final and irrevocable. But still Lord, you call us to be your body, your hands and feet. To build up your people on you as the foundation and how we do that, with what material we do that with will be judged. And you will either give us reward or we will suffer extreme loss. And so Lord, show us what it means to be led by the Spirit, to surrender our own desire, our own flesh, our own pride, to surrender all of that and allow you to fill us – to transform us, to work in us and to work through us. Give us the revelation knowledge of what we're doing that's in the flesh. Help us to see, instead of getting mad, or instead of reacting or that stuff we do, let us see you at work and see that you're still chipping away the flesh in us. And we say, pierce us, Lord, grind us, do that surgery, remove the life of flesh. Crucify it in us, so that you can have your way in us and through us that our eyes*

would be set on this day, when we stand before you with our work, fully expecting for something to come out of the other side of the oven. Make it real to us, make it specific to us.

I just want to give you a moment. Put something in your life in that place. Right now. You're not here to just pass the time. God wants to use this Word to bring up one thing (or a hundred things) in your life. Just pick one, and say, *Lord – this. I am angry here. I'm bitter there, I'm resentful here. I'm unforgiving there. I'm leading my own life here. And yet I'm still trying to fool myself into thinking I'm serving you.*

Put a situation in your life, right in the middle of this message. Take some time and do that.

Lord Jesus, that thing that is certainly fuel for the fire we pray you would burn it up now. Refine us. Bring the dross of our lives to the surface and remove it. We long to be with you in heaven, we pray that we would come with work worthy of your reward. Lead and guide us to that point, for your glory here, and in your name, Jesus, amen.