

Sunday, January 17, 2016—I Corinthians 3:12-13: The Trial by Fire

### Introduction/Review

- Last week during our time together we studied verses 9 through 11. In doing so we observed the following points.
- I Corinthians 3:9—“we” refers to Paul and Apollos as “labourers together” at Corinth. Whereas the “ye” refers to the Corinthians. The saints in Corinth were God’s husbandry and building. Verse 9 introduces the illustration of a building.
- I Corinthians 3:10—the thing that is critical to understand here is that the foundation Paul laid for this building within the saints in Corinth was not arbitrary but it was “according to” something. It was according to “the grace of God that was given” unto Paul.
  - *As a wise masterbuilder*— according to the grace given unto him, Paul served the function of “a wise masterbuilder” with respect to laying the foundation for this building.
  - *I have laid the foundation*—Paul was not building upon anyone else’s foundation rather he was laying a new one.
  - *But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon*— note the shift at the end of verse 10, the word “but” at the beginning of the second sentence establishes a contrast. This is evident by the expression “every man.” The expression “take heed” is in the present tense which means that each individual believer is to be continually and carefully watching how they build upon the foundation laid by Paul.
- I Corinthians 3:11—makes it clear that there is no other foundation for the church of this dispensation than the one Paul laid which is Jesus Christ.
- Now that we have understood what the foundation is in verses 10 and 11 we want to look at how to build upon it in the following verses.

### I Corinthians 3:12

- **Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;**
- *Now if any man build upon this foundation*—the expression “any man” takes the reader back up to the end verse 10 where we saw the warning given that “every man” needs to take heed how he builds upon the foundation laid by Paul.
- The verb “build” is a present active indicative in Greek which means that the saints in Corinth were already building something upon Paul’s foundation while Paul is penning the statement.

This means that the statement “if any build upon this foundation” is not calling into question whether or not the Corinthians were building rather it is stating the fact that they are already doing so.

- According to verse 12 there are six things that a man can be building upon Paul’s foundation: gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble.

### **I Corinthians 3:13**

- **Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.**
- *Every man's work shall be made manifest*—what work is being made manifest in verse 13? Contextually, it would be every man’s work in building upon Paul’s foundation. Again note the stress on every man.
  - Verse 10—“every man” is warned to “take heed” how he builds.
  - Verse 12—states the fact that “any man” is building something.
  - Verse 13—declares that “every man’s” work in building we be made manifest.
- The expression “shall be made” is in the future tense indicating that this manifestation of the believers work will take place at some time in the future.
- According to *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary* the English word “manifest” means: “plain, open, clearly visible to the eye or obvious to the understanding; apparent; not obscure or difficult to be seen or understood. From the testimony, the truth we conceive to be manifest.”
- So at some point in the future every believers work in building upon Paul’s foundation “shall be made manifest” thus the warning in verse 10 to “take heed” how one is building. In this verse it is a man’s work that is made manifest i.e., plain, open, and clearly visible to the eye. Since Paul is using the imagery of building upon the foundation in this context, let us consider the illustration of a house. From the outside a house can look wonderful and grand. However, further inspection can MANIFEST problems that are not detectible upon first glance, or even a second glance. This is why people order inspections when they buy a home. They want to make sure there are no unseen problems that would threaten the integrity of the home. The fact that a believer’s work will “be manifest” indicates that it is not just the outward appearance of the structure that gets disclosed, for that is readily apparent to the eye, but the unseen and hidden aspects of the work as well.
- This manifestation of the believer’s work is NOT based on an external judgment or outward observation alone, but is rather a test that determines the inner character and motivation of one’s work.

- *For the day shall declare it*—once again the future aspect of this day is made plain by the expression “shall declare.” The English word “declare” simply means to make clear, according to *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*. So there is an appointed day in the future when every man’s work will be made manifest, declared, and made clear. Based upon our previous studies, we know that believers will be made known and fully disclosed at the JSC. I believe “the day” portion of this verse is speaking in relation to the JSC which we know is a future event.
  - Romans 14:10
  - II Corinthians 5:10
- *Because it shall be revealed by fire*—what is the “it” in this part of the verse that is being manifest and declared? A man’s work from the first part of the verse. Note that a man’s work will be manifest and declared because it shall be revealed (future tense) by fire.
- The English word “revealed” means, “disclosed; discovered; made known; laid open,” according to Webster’s 1828 Dictionary. So how exactly is a man’s work going to be manifest, declared, and revealed? By fire.
- *And the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.*—a man’s work is going to be tested by fire to see what it reveals or to determine its “sort.” The English word “sort” carries many meanings one of which is derivative, signifying that which is thrown out, separated or selected.
- At the JSC a man’s work is going to be sorted (suitable, befitting—*Webster’s 1828*). The implication is clear, the fire will manifest, declare, reveal, and sort by consuming and destroying those aspects of a believers work that inferior and unacceptable while those that are acceptable will abide i.e., survive the trial by fire. The entire purpose of the trial by fire is to determine that which is destructible from that which is indestructible.
- Taken with verse 12 the implication is clear. The gold, silver, and precious stones are indestructible materials whereas the wood, hay, and stubble are destructible. The indestructible sort indicates those things done in the believer’s life under the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. In contrast, the destructible sort indicates work that men produced of their own wisdom and effort i.e., the works of the flesh.
- Jeremiah 17:9—we need to be careful about how we build upon Paul’s foundation since our hearts can be so easily deceived as to the nature of our own motives.
- Paul is revealing the fact that the examination at the JSC is to determine that which was done by Christ through the individual and that which the individual did in his own strength; that which was done for the glory of God and that which was done for the glory of the flesh. It cannot be determined by outward observation into which SORT a man’s work falls, so that work must be subjected to the trial by fire in order that its true character may be proved.

- Ephesians 2:10—it's all about allowing ourselves to be the workmanship of Christ and allowing his life to be made manifest in our mortal flesh (II Cor. 4:10-11).
- Galatians 5:18—the Spirit of God leads men to follow sound doctrine.
- In our next study we will consider the results of this trial by fire.