

Sunday, January 24, 2016—I Corinthians 3:14-15: Reward and Loss, Part 1

Introduction/Review

- Last week during our time together we looked at I Corinthians 3:12-13. In doing so we observed the following.
- I Corinthians 3:12—every member of the body of Christ is building something upon the foundation laid by Paul. 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—there is a day in the future (“shall” occurs 4 times in the verse) where “every man’s work shall be made manifest.” The following three words are used to describe what will transpire at the JSC.
 - Manifest—plain, open, clearly visible to the eye or obvious to the understanding; apparent; not obscure or difficult to be seen or understood. (*Webster’s 1828*)
 - Declare—to make clear. (*Webster’s 1828*)
 - Declared—made known; told explicitly; avowed; exhibited; manifested; published; proclaimed; recited. (*Webster’s 1828*)
 - Revealed—disclosed; discovered; made known; laid open. (*Webster’s 1828*)
- So how is “every man’s work” in building upon Paul’s foundation going to be made manifest, declared, and revealed? It is going to be tried by fire. The fire will “try every man’s work” and reveal “what sort it is.”
- This morning we want to continue with our exposition of I Corinthians 3 by looking at verses 14 and 15.

I Corinthians 3:14

- **If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.**
- *If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon*—as in verse 12 the “if” at the beginning of verse 14 serves the logical function. Paul just said at the end of verse 13 that the fire “will try every man’s work of what sort it is.”
- This verse is a statement of basic logic known as *modus ponens* or if some such thing than some such thing i.e., if P than Q.
 - P—If any man’s work abide

- Q—He shall receive a reward
- So work that abides the trial by fire will receive a reward.
- Notice again that this is referring to “any man” this is the sixth time Paul has used a form of this all inclusive expression since he began to bring up the issue of reward in verse 8. Again the JSC pertains to every member of the body of Christ.
 - Verse 8—“every man shall receive his own reward”
 - Verse 10—“let every man take heed”
 - Verse 12—“if any man build upon this foundation”
 - Verse 13—“every man’s work” (2x)
 - Verse 14—“any man’s work”
- The Greek work translated “abide” means to remain or endure. This verse is talking about work that “abides” or survives the trial by fire in verse 13.
- *Which he hath built thereupon*—any work that abides is in reference to how the individual built upon Paul’s foundation. Verse 10 warns every man to “take heed” how he is building and verse 12 describes six different “sorts” or manners of workmanship with which one can build upon the foundation laid by Paul.
- Of the six “sorts” or qualities of workmanship mention in verse 12 only three will “abide” a trial by fire: gold, silver, and precious stones. Consider the outcome if the following were subjected to fire:
 - Gold—would melt but not be consumed.
 - Silver—would melt but not be consumed.
 - Precious Stones—would remain unscathed.
- Revelation 21:18-21—the Heavenly Jerusalem is described as being made of pure gold upon a foundation of precious stones. Silver is not mentioned in relation to the Heavenly City.
- Exodus 28:15-21—these same stones were in the breastplate of the high priest which was made of gold.

- Ezekiel 28:12-13—Lucifer the sum total of God’s creative expression in terms of beauty and wisdom was decorated with precious stones and gold.
- Silver is not mention in the preceding three passages.
- Proverbs 8:10-11
 - Instruction—Silver
 - Knowledge—Gold
 - Wisdom—Rubies
- When I taught on the JSC in 2014 I stated the following about the various “sorts” of workmanship in building upon Paul’s foundation in verse 12.
 - Based upon these verses, it seems reasonable to rank the sorts of workmanship Paul has identified in I Corinthians 3 as follows: 1) Precious Stones, 2) Gold, and 3) Silver. So any man’s work that abides the trial by fire falls into one of these three “sorts.”
- *He shall receive a reward*—so the man whose work abides shall receive a reward. Please note once again the future tense ascribed to this statement. Since the trial by fire is future according to verse 13 it follows logically that the reception of reward based upon what the fire reveals would also lie in the future in verse 14.
- The Greek word translated “reward” here means “dues paid for work,” or it is “used of the fruit naturally resulting from toils or endeavors.”
 - Matthew 20:8—“hire”
 - Luke 10:7—“hire”
 - John 4:36—“wages”
 - I Timothy 5:18—“reward”
- I Corinthians 3:8—remember that “every man” will receive “his own reward according to his own labour.”
- According to *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary* the English word “reward” carries the following meaning:
 - To give in return, either good or evil. Hence, when good is returned for good, reward signifies to repay, to recompense, to compensate. When evil or suffering is return for

injury or wickedness, reward signifies to punish with just retribution, to take vengeance on, according to the nature of the case.

- So we see from the definition of the word “reward” that it can apply in either the positive or the negative depending on how the word is being used. In verse 14, Paul has the positive side in mind:
 - “recompense, or equivalent return for good done, for kindness, for services and the like. Rewards may consist of money, goods or any return of kindness or happiness.”
- What is tried by fire at the judgment seat? Every man’s work. It is a general principal that a man is rewarded for a proper days work. Those who build properly upon the foundation laid by Paul will be rewarded for their work.

I Corinthians 3:15

- **If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.**
- *If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss*—the first half of verse 15 exhibits the same logical structure as verse 14.
 - P—If any man’s work shall be burned
 - Q—he shall suffer loss.
- Please note yet again that Paul is talking about “any man’s work” here in verse 15. For those of you who are counting, this constitutes the 7th time Paul has mentioned this since verse 8. In addition, the expression “shall be burned” and “shall suffer loss” are in the future tense. Once again, this follows logically from verses 13 and 14.
- The English word “burned” means “consumed with fire,” according to *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*. This is obviously the “sort” or work that is characterized by the wood, hay, and stubble in verse 12. These sorts of work will be consumed by the fire.
- Fire is used in other parts of the Bible to describe judgment or the consumption what is left behind following the harvest.
 - Matthew 3:13
 - Matthew 13:40
- *He shall suffer loss*—the one whose work is consumed in the fire will suffer loss. In the context what kind of loss is being suffered here? It is the loss of reward. The one whose work abides is

rewarded by receiving a reward and the one whose work is burned is rewarded by suffering the loss of reward. There are two possible outcomes of the JSC:

- Rewarded by receiving a reward—verse 14
- Rewarded by suffering the loss of reward—verse 15
- Regarding the rewards at the JSC, Dwight Pentecost wrote in part,
 - “On the basis of this test there will be two decisions. There will loss of reward for that which is proved by fire to be destructible. Things done in the strength and for the glory of the flesh, regardless of what the act might be, will be disapproved. . . There will be a reward bestowed for that work that is proved to be indestructible by the fire test.” (*Things to Come*, 224-225)
- *But he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire*—the believer is not on trial at the JSC but rather the believer’s work. Remember that only believers will appear before the JSC. Only believers are capable of building upon Paul’s foundation. As I said last Sunday, if a fire burns down an entire house the foundation remains. Our foundation and salvation is safe, secure, and sound because it is NOT BASED upon our works but upon Christ work on our behalf.
- The JSC is similar to judged athletic completion. The athletes participating are judged and rewards and handout in the form of medals but there is no condemnation placed upon those failing to medal they simply fail to receive a reward.