

## “Works: Purified or Fried?” (1 Corinthians 3:9-15)

During the Middle Ages many Gothic churches were built. Gothic churches were elaborate and beautiful buildings. They required great time and energy to build. Yet what is most fascinating about these churches is the manner in which they were constructed. A mine was established, often as much as 50 miles from the place where the church was to be erected. When the rocks were mined volunteers from all over the countryside would form a living chain from the mine to the building site. The rocks would then be passed from hand to hand all the way to the construction site.<sup>1</sup> If anyone in the rock chain dropped the stone or failed to do his or her part the church could not be built up.

Today, the church is still dependent upon believers faithfully working together to build the church. If we fail to properly build Christ’s church she will never be all that God desires her to be. More importantly, the Bible declares that our future reward comes from building Christ’s church, here and now. In other words, what we do with our lives here on earth will have serious ramifications on our heavenly experience. Consequently, *the time to prepare for tomorrow is today.*

In 1 Cor 3:9-15, Paul describes the church as a building.<sup>2</sup> He stresses the quality we should strive for in constructing each stage—from laying the foundation, through the actual construction, to the final inspection. And in this image he gives some of Christianity’s nuts and bolts, in the form of two construction tips.

**1. Make sure to build on the right foundation (3:9-11).** In 3:9 Paul writes, “**For we [Paul and Apollos] are God’s fellow workers; you [Corinthians] are God’s field,<sup>3</sup> God’s building.**” Verse 9 is what is called a “hinge verse.” It closes out 3:5-8 and opens up 3:10-15. In 3:9b, Paul transitions with the statement: “You are God’s field, God’s building.” In the previous section (3:5-9a), Paul used Apollos as an illustration. Yet, in 3:9b he deliberately changes metaphors from watering to building, because the section that follows (3:10-15) is not addressed with Apollos in mind. Rather, it is addressed with the Corinthian church in mind.<sup>4</sup> In this simple phrase Paul informs us that the church is “God’s building.” What a great reminder that God’s desire is to work in and through the local church. This is a message that we need to be reminded of today. Many Christians have given up on the church. Consequently, they are critical and cynical of the church’s potential. This grieves the heart of God. As Christians who are called to build the church, we ought to be the biggest fans of the church. Today, if you have been guilty of having a cynical or critical attitude toward the church, confess your sin to the Lord. Remember, the church is God’s building, so when you say something critical about Jesus’ building you need to make things right with Him. You can do that today by praying, “Lord Jesus, forgive me for having a bad attitude about your house. Help me to see the church the way You do. Help me to be a part of the solution and not a part of the problem. I have confidence in You that You will build Your house.” This is a critical step. You and I cannot build the church until we share Jesus’ perspective and attitude.

In 3:10-11, we will learn how to build on the right foundation. Paul explains, “**According to the grace of God which was given to me [Paul], like a wise master builder I [Paul] laid a foundation, and another [you, Corinthians]<sup>5</sup> is building on it. But each man [you, Corinthians] 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.**”<sup>6</sup> In 3:10a, Paul is careful to state that his ministry is “according to the grace of God.” He can’t take credit for who he is or what he has accomplished because it is all God’s grace. Likewise, you and I have been called to serve God in His building, the church. Whatever we are able to accomplish is an expression of His grace. Paul states that he served “like a wise master builder.” The term “master builder” (*architekton*) is used only here in the New Testament.<sup>7</sup> Paul intends a wider meaning than today’s “architect” who is only a designer of blueprints.<sup>8</sup> After all, he has personally done the construction work of laying the foundation. An *architekton* is a skilled church planter who wisely constructs a strong foundation.<sup>9</sup>

The foundation that the *architekton* builds upon is Jesus Christ (3:11). When Paul came to Corinth he determined to preach only Christ and Him crucified (2:1-2).<sup>10</sup> He laid the only foundation that would last.<sup>11</sup> The foundation is the most important part of the building, because it determines the size, shape, and strength of the superstructure. A ministry may seem to be successful for a time, but if it is not founded on Christ it will eventually collapse and disappear. The question for every church must be, “Is our church and its ministries built upon Christ?” By that I mean, “Do we do what we do because we love Jesus Christ and are committed to His glory?” To the degree that Jesus Christ is the foundation and bedrock our church will be successful, at least in God’s eyes.

It is worth noting that Paul urges us to be careful *how* we build on the foundation. The word “how” (*pos*)<sup>12</sup> emphasizes the method or manner of building more than what is done. The point seems to be: It is not how *much* we do for Christ, but *what* we do and *how* we do it.<sup>13</sup> It is *quality* over quantity. This is why I have said, “Choose one ministry and do it well.” If you and I try to do everything we will fail miserably. God calls us to find our niche and use our spiritual gift to build up the body. Have you found your area to serve? Are you serving with a desire to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ? If so, God will reward you for your faithfulness to Him. *The time to prepare for tomorrow is today.*

[Paul has urged us to make sure that we are building on the right foundation. This occurs when we build upon Jesus Christ. Once we have started the work of building on the right foundation, we must raise the question, “What is the next step?” Paul will tell us in 3:12-15.]

**2. Make sure to build with the right materials (3:12-15).** God is concerned that we build with quality. The church does not belong to the preacher or to the congregation. It is *God’s* church (cf. 3:9). If we are going to build the local church the way God wants it built we must meet certain conditions. Looking back to 3:10b, Paul wants the Corinthians to be careful *how* they build on the foundation. To build properly requires using the right materials. Hence, in 3:12-13 Paul writes, “**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 [the works]<sup>14</sup> is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work.**”<sup>15</sup> At first glance it looks like there are six different kinds of materials here.<sup>16</sup> But in fact, there are only two kinds: costly or cheap, imperishable or perishable, permanent or temporary. In light of Paul’s discussion and concerns in 1 Corinthians, “gold, silver, precious stones” are quality materials, fit for construction on the foundation of Christ crucified.<sup>17</sup> These materials are worthy of that foundation and fit to endure fire.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, “wood, hay, straw” are inferior materials, unfit for construction on the foundation Paul laid because they are not “fireproof.” Rather, these materials are the perishable stuff of human wisdom that finds the gospel foolish. The focus is on the *quality* of the building. Paul urges his readers to use only the best materials—long-lasting ones, not temporal and flammable ones.

What are some examples of these two kinds of materials? I would suggest to you that a heart of service is like gold, silver, and precious stones, while spiritual laziness and the attitude, “let others do it, I’ve done my time,” is like wood, hay, and straw in God’s sight. Generosity with the Lord and with His people is gold, silver, and precious stones, while self-centeredness and stinginess are wood, hay, and straw. Coming to church with a heart of worship is the former; coming to impress others is the latter. Doing ministry only after it has been bathed in prayer is the former; doing it in one’s own strength is the latter.

A wealthy woman died one day and went to heaven. An angel then took her to her heavenly abode, which was a plain old ordinary building. Right next door to her was her gardener who had a palatial mansion. She said, “How did my gardener get a mansion and I get a plain old ordinary building?” The angel then said, “Well, we only build with the materials you send us.” If you’re sending to heaven junk, junk is then what God uses. He uses only what you send Him! Thus, *the time to prepare for tomorrow is today.*

Paul wants to emphasize the truth that the builders of the Corinthian church will one day have their work (even their secret or unknown activities) judged by Christ. As a result, each person will be rewarded according to his or her efforts in building up the church. This day of testing will take place at the judgment seat of Christ.<sup>19</sup> The purpose of the testing is to give an *examination* of the worker as to the nature of his “work,” not a *condemnation* of the worker as to his person. In a context dealing with work and its reward, it is reasonable to understand that loss is a loss with respect to reward. The worker loses in reference to the measure of potential reward he might have received for the burned “work,” had Christ appraised it as work that “remains.”

Paul tells us that there is a fire coming and only quality building materials will survive the fire. In the Bible, the word “fire” means either hell or judgment. When it is referring to unbelievers it means hell; when it is referring to Christians it means judgment in time or in eternity. In this context fire purifies gold, silver, and precious stones, but it extinguishes wood, hay, straw.<sup>20</sup> The reason that our works have to be subjected to the flames is because the natural light cannot easily tell the difference between these building materials. Not even Paul was confident that he could always separate junk from gems. From our perspective, a believer might have nothing but an impressive pile of combustible material; but when torched, nuggets of gold might be found embedded in the straw. Conversely, what we thought was a gold brick of some notable saint might just be the end of a wooden beam. Only the fire can separate the real from the fake.<sup>21</sup>

If you have built or sold a home, you know how important inspection day is. Yet no matter how confident you are that your home will pass inspection, there is still apprehension that the inspector will find your craftsmanship lacking. If you have been cutting any corners the inspection day will bring it to light. This should cause each of us to humble our heart and prostrate our soul before Christ. *The time to prepare for tomorrow is today.*

Imagine that your father, a multibillionaire, purchases two one-acre tracts of land for you and your sibling. He pours a foundation on each piece of land and then gives each of you one million dollars, with these instructions: “I am going to give you one year to build the most beautiful home you can construct. At the end of the year, the one who builds the most elaborate house will receive twice as much of my estate as the other.” You and your sibling are thrilled with the possibility. You begin work immediately. You hire architects to draw up the plans, you ask contractors for estimates, and you establish a rigid schedule to make sure you complete your work on time. When the deadline arrives, you have a home that rivals the Taj Mahal. However, your sibling is not as industrious. Family responsibilities, work, and hobbies keep him from the task at hand. Not only that, but he has some immediate needs for that one million dollars: college tuition, a new car, and a swimming pool. The night before the deadline, he decides to get busy and construct the best home he can with little money and only a few hours of time. A grass hut is all he can manage to build. The next morning your father surveys the two homes. He praises you for your efforts and rewards you with the promise of a large portion of his vast estate. As he walks around your sibling’s grass hut, however, he expresses his disappointment. As a result of procrastination and squandering of resources, your sibling forfeited billions of dollars of future wealth. He is still in the family but he does not receive the same reward.<sup>22</sup>

Many Christians have ignored the command to build carefully. As a result, they will lose out on the rewards that God had in store for them. Now you may think, “Well, that’s okay by me, just as long as I make it into heaven.” I can assure you that when you stand before Jesus Christ, you will wish more than anything in this world that you had obeyed His command. *The time to prepare for tomorrow is today.*

[Why is God so concerned that we build on the right foundation with the right materials? The reason Paul exhorts us so seriously about the materials we use in building God’s church is that there is going to be an inspection.]

In 3:14 Paul writes, **“If any man’s work which he has built on it [the foundation] remains [survives], he will receive a reward.”** The word “if” (*ei*) in both 3:14 and 3:15 is used in a first-class conditional clause where the condition is assumed to be true.<sup>23</sup> This does not demand that both statements are true, but for the sake of argument Paul presents each statement as true. Thus, Paul states that each individual bears responsibility for his or her contribution to building upon the foundation, and will receive a reward or loss on the basis of the quality of workmanship.<sup>24</sup> The phrase “he will receive a reward” means to receive wages for work done.<sup>25</sup> Since God is a just and gracious God, He will ensure that each Corinthian receives his or her due. God is no man’s debtor. While the specific nature of the reward is not laid out in this passage, three areas seem to be related to rewards: (1) privileges (Luke 12:37; 2 Pet 1:11; Rev 2:7), (2) praise (Matt 25:21), and (3) positions (Luke 16:10-12; 19:17-19). These rewards all allow us to experience God more intimately and reflect His glory more effectively (Dan 12:2-3; 1 Cor 15:40-41; Rev 4:10-11).

So what is God looking for? The Bible is clear that God will reward us for our deeds (Matt 16:27; Rom 2:6; 2 Cor 5:10; Eph 6:8; Rev 2:23), our words (Matt 12:36-37; Jas 3:1-12), and our motives (1 Cor 4:4-5; 10:31; Col 3:23-24). As our perfect Judge, He will take all of these areas into consideration and render a just verdict. Therefore, *the time to prepare for tomorrow is today.*

Personally, I don’t think I will ever be asked by God, “How many people did you preach to each Sunday?” But I do expect to be asked questions like, “How faithful were you to my Word? Did you preach in the power of the Spirit rather than in your own power and intellect? Did you live at home what you preached at church? And I think you will be asked similar questions. Did you honor my name in your business? Did you teach your children the truths of God’s Word? Did you love your spouse as Christ loved the church?” None of these things involve official positions in the church, but they are, nevertheless, critical issues to building the church—the family of God. Church building has as much to do with thought life, prayer life, motives, parenting, hospitality, and love for people as it does with teaching Sunday school or preaching or ushering.<sup>26</sup>

Paul closes our passage by disclosing another type of builder. In 3:15 Paul writes, **“If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”**<sup>28</sup> It appears Paul conceives of the possibility that a member of the Corinthian church could have his or her work “burned up.”<sup>29</sup> The result is that such a person will “suffer loss.”<sup>30</sup> This means that the Christian worker will lose his or her reward, like a workman fined of his wages for poor workmanship.<sup>31</sup> This Christian will lose the measure of reward he or she might have had.<sup>32</sup> This loss may be diminished praise and increased shame before Christ’s judgment seat, when the Corinthians realize how much of their lives were spent in activity of no eternal value.<sup>33</sup>

Contextually, it appears that the individual in 3:15a was potentially guilty of partiality and disunity (1:12; 3:1-4), human wisdom (1:17-25), and human evaluation of calling (1:26-31). Warning is given to those who are wise in their own eyes (3:18-20) and those who boast in human leaders (3:21-22). This does not mean that he was “fleshly” in every area of his life. It is possible that he excelled in areas of individual holiness, yet failed miserably in his ministry of corporate building. Hence, this careless builder will “suffer loss” for his or her failure to build well on the foundation of the church.<sup>34</sup> Paul’s concern here seems to be a wasted life of corporate service.<sup>35</sup>

The loss of rewards seems to be an even greater motivation than the gain of rewards. Think back to the time when you were a child. If your dad offered to take you out to pizza if you cleaned your room, you may have been motivated to do so. However, if your dad gave you five dollars for cleaning your room and then took a dollar away every time he found it messy, this would be agonizing. The loss of reward would hurt the most. This serves as a motivation.<sup>36</sup>

Christian service that has no lasting value is like junk food—it may look and taste good and fill your stomach, but when it’s melted down there is nothing left but grease, sugar, calories, salt, and fat. So the next time you go to the donut shop or the drive-through at the local hamburger stand, think of the judgment seat of Christ. When all that grease and sugar and fat are melted away there isn’t much of nutritional value left. You and I don’t want to present a life full of spiritual junk food to Christ, because it is going into the flames. We want to present Him with a life of sincere quality service that will survive the test and receive a reward.<sup>37</sup>

Paul concludes this section with the statement, “but he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Cor 3:15b). The Corinthian believer who builds poorly will suffer the loss of his or her work and potential reward, *but* will be eternally saved.<sup>38</sup> The phrase “as through fire” is an idiom meaning “to escape with difficulty, to have a narrow escape.” The idiom is occasioned by the reference to the fire that tests the work of the Corinthians. It is likely that the phrase had become a metaphor, like “a firebrand plucked from the burning” (Amos 4:11), comparable to “saved by the skin of one’s teeth.”<sup>39</sup> This further demonstrates the solemn nature of the judgment seat of Christ.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps this analogy will help you understand how heaven will be a place of joy and regret for some Christians. Imagine last year that your insurance agent said, “I’ve been reviewing your homeowner’s policy, and I believe you are underinsured by \$50,000. I would recommend that you increase your coverage.” But suppose you had said, “Let me think about it, and I’ll get back to you in a few weeks.” That very night you are awakened by the smell of smoke. Hearing the screams of your children, you stumble through the thick fog until you reach their bedrooms. Grabbing your children, you grope through the darkness, searching for a way out. But all of the exits are blocked, so you throw a chair through the window and climb through the broken glass. Once safely outside you watch in horror as your home is consumed by the flames. What emotions do you feel at that moment? Certainly you are relieved that your family made it safely through the fire. No one could place a price tag on their lives. Nevertheless, you also feel a deep sense of regret as you consider the financial loss that you are about to experience because you made a wrong choice about your insurance. Your joy of survival is tempered by your feelings of regret.<sup>41</sup>

If what I have suggested of the Corinthians is correct, the particular loss that they will suffer stems from their failure to properly build on the foundation of the church at Corinth. It does not appear that the loss concerns every area of his or her life. Jesus Himself said, “And whoever gives *only* a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple, I tell you the truth, he will *never lose his reward*” (Matt 10:42, *NET*, my emphasis). Like a loving father, Jesus appears to be gracious and generous with rewards for His children. Therefore, it seems improbable that a member of the Corinthian church who was building on the foundation (teacher or otherwise), would be without one single work in every area of his or her life. It seems that Paul is expressing his deep love for the church and suggesting that one who builds poorly on the church will jeopardize one’s reward.

My desire is for you realize that *the time to prepare for tomorrow is today*. The great reformer, Martin Luther (1483-1546), is quoted as saying, “There are two days on my calendar: ‘Today’ and ‘That Day.’” If we live like that, we can prepare for our eternal home.

Do you remember Holiday Inn’s ad a few years back? “The best surprise is no surprise at all.” Their promise was that if you visit some new place, they’ll make it seem like a place you’ve been before. This should be our heavenly experience. We should not wind up in heaven surprised that we have no works to offer Jesus. We should know, from our experience here on earth, that we served our Savior and loved His church. *The time to prepare for tomorrow is today*.

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**Scripture Reference**

1 Corinthians 3:10-15  
1 Corinthians 1:10-17  
2 Corinthians 5:10  
Romans 14:10-12  
Luke 19:11-27  
Matthew 16:27  
Revelation 22:12

**Study Questions**

1. What is my view of the local church? Do I see the church as God's primary vehicle to build up believers and impact society? Why is it easy to be so pessimistic and critical toward the church? How can I change my attitude and speech? Have I been guilty of not participating and serving in the church?
2. How have I built my life and ministry upon Jesus Christ? What does this look like in the course of my week? Where do I tend to compromise my building plans? What can I do to correct this?
3. When have I built with gold, silver, and precious stones? When have I built with wood, hay, and straw?
4. If Jesus Christ returned today, would I be prepared to stand before Him and give an account of my life? How can I look forward to Christ's return (2 Tim 4:8)?
5. Which of my works (or lack thereof) will burn to a crisp in eternity? Which works will stand the test of time? How can I ensure that more of my works will pass through the fire?

**Suggested Reading on the Judgment Seat of Christ**

Alcorn, Randy. *The Law of Rewards*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2003.

Benware, Paul N. *The Believer's Payday*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2002.

Chitwood, Arlen L. *Judgment Seat of Christ*. Norman, OK: The Lamp Broadcast, Inc., 1986.

Crockett, Kent. *Making Today Count for Eternity*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2001.

Dillow, Joseph C. *The Reign of the Servant Kings*. Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 1992.

Hodges, Zane C. *Grace in Eclipse*. Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1985.

Hodges, Zane C. *The Hungry Inherit*. Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1997.

Howard, Rick and Jamie Lash. *This Was Your Life!* Grand Rapids: Chosen, 1998.

Kendall, R.T. *The Judgment Seat of Christ*. Scotland: Christian Focus, 2004.

Lutzer, Erwin W. *Your Eternal Reward: Triumph and Tears at the Judgment Seat of Christ*. Chicago: Moody, 1998.

Stevenson, Tim. *The Bema: A Story about the Judgment Seat of Christ*. Gainesville, TX: Fair Havens, 2001.

Wall, Joe L. *Going for the Gold*. Chicago: Moody, 1991.

Wilkin, Bob. *The Road to Reward*. Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2003.

Wilkinson, Bruce. *A Life God Rewards*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2002.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Preaching Today citation: David Louis, *2201 Fascinating Facts*, p. 32 (Ridge Press, 1983); submitted by Ted De Hass, Bedford, IA.

<sup>2</sup> The usual explanation of this passage is that it describes the building of the Christian life. We all build on Christ, but some people use good materials while others use poor materials. The kind of material you use determines the kind of reward you will get. While this may be a valid *application* of this passage, it is not the basic *interpretation*. The focus is upon building the local church on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> Thiselton breaks the verse here, treating 1 Cor 3:9c as the commencement of another section, “The Image of the Building and the Testing of the Builders’ Work” (3:9c-15). Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> “The section that follows is not addressed to the one who waters, it is not addressed to the one who teaches or who ministers because the superstructure is not in the hands of teachers or preachers. The superstructure is in the hands of believers and God has authorized them to erect the superstructure.” R.T. Kendall, *When God says, “Well Done!”* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 1993), 48.

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that many scholars see this section as relevant only to teachers. It is suggested that Paul is the “wise master builder” who “laid a foundation,” and Apollos is “another,” who is building on it. See Calvin Roetzel, *Judgment in the Community* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 166; Paul Ellingworth, and Howard Hatton, *A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1985), 65; R.A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*: Abingdon New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 65. However, the present tense verb *epoikodomei* (“is building on it”) is problematic for those who think Paul refers to Apollos, since Apollos currently is not present in Corinth. See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 138; Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 133. Kerr argues that *epoikodomei* (3:10) is a vivid present tense verb because Apollos will eventually return (16:12). Donald P. Kerr, “Paul and Apollos—Colleagues or Rivals,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 77 (Mar 2000): 75-97. Yet, this seems to be special pleading. Paul is not aiming his remarks toward Apollos or any other apostle or any of their presumed supporters.

Contextually, the word *allos* (“another”) refers to the Corinthians who build on the foundation. This position is confirmed within the general context of 3:9b. In 3:1-3, Paul addressed the Corinthians in general. In 3:5-9, he referred to Apollos as a servant through whom the Corinthians believed, and who “watered” what Paul planted. Paul saw himself as one with Apollos, and together they were not anything, because the church was “God’s field, God’s building.” From 3:16 to 3:23, Paul again addresses the believers of Corinth in general. Therefore, to apply 3:10-15 *only* to church leaders creates an inconsistency in Paul’s whole purpose. He wants the Corinthians to know that leaders are not important enough to divide over. In fact, they are “one” with the leader and all work together.

The immediate context also argues that the word “another” refers to the Corinthians who build on the foundation. In 3:10-13, Paul uses indefinite pronouns such as *allos* (“another, other”), *hekastos* (“each,” 1:12; 4:5), and *oudeis* (“no one”). See Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians: Sacra Pagina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 150; H.H. Drake Williams III, *The Wisdom of the Wise: The Presence and Function of Scripture Within 1 Cor 1:18-3:23* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 293. Furthermore, the use of *ei tis* (“if any man”) in 3:12, 14, 15 also suggests that Paul’s words are not limited to teachers or representatives of teachers. Williams, *The Wisdom of the Wise*, 294. Paul also seems to imply a number of different builders in the conclusion of his argument in 4:15. David W. Kuck, *Judgment and Community Conflict: Paul’s use of Apocalyptic Judgment Language in 1 Corinthians 3:5-4:5* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 1992), 172.

This makes both logical and biblical sense. Since all the Corinthians are potential leaders in some small sphere of ministry, and all ultimately contribute in one way or another to the growth or stagnation of the church, it seems far too restrictive to limit the judgment of these verses to a select group of apostles or teachers. See also Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*: NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 79. Dunn writes, “The warning of 3:10c is almost certainly directed to the Corinthians, rather than to Apollos or one of the missionaries who followed Paul to Corinth (see Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 138-39). But even if the warning was more narrowly directed, it still expresses a principle of divine judgment which Paul presumably affirmed more widely, as the previous paragraph implies.” James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Cambridge, UK, 1998), 491 n. 130.

<sup>6</sup> Christ Himself is the foundation of the church (Matt 16:18; cf. Isa 28:16; Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:6).

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<sup>7</sup> Ancient texts are not highly definitive as to the duties of an *architekton*. In 2 Macc 2:29 an architect has comprehensive responsibility over all particulars of a building work. This is in contrast to an architect who must be concerned only with one phase of work such as adorning a building. Isaiah 3:3 (LXX) links the *architekton* with positions requiring expertise. Sirach 38:27 distinguishes him from *tektion* (“carpenter”).

<sup>8</sup> Paul combines *architekton* with *sophos* (“wise, skilled”). His emphasis is on being an “expert” or “highly qualified workman.” Yet, this adjective also relates to the dispute with the “wise in this age” (3:18-20) and his assertion that he speaks “wisdom not of this age” (2:6-16).

<sup>9</sup> Kent L. Yinger, *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 216-217.

<sup>10</sup> Williams, *The Wisdom of the Wise*, 292 points out the “foundation” (*thelimos*) has a number of associations with it:

- 1) The foundation is related to true wisdom since Paul speaks this to all (1 Cor 2:6-7).
- 2) The foundation is explicitly related to Christ in 1 Cor 3:11. Indeed, Paul spoke about Christ alone when he came to Corinth (1 Cor 2:2).
- 3) The writers of Scripture declare that Christ Himself is the foundation of the church (Matt 16:18; cf. Isa 28:16; Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:6). Paul laid the foundation for the church in Corinth when he preached Christ and Him crucified there. The foundation is also connected to the entirety of the work of God since the metaphor of a foundation stone indicates that it is the basis of the whole building (cf. Eph 2:20).
- 4) The foundation should be seen in association with the Scriptures as it is on another occasion in Paul’s writing (Rom 15:20-21). Paul’s founding gospel message amongst the Corinthians is portrayed to be according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:1-5; cf. Isa 28:16 in 1 Cor 1:21-24; Zech 4:6 in 1 Cor 2:3-5; Dan 2:19-23 in 1 Cor 2:6-8).

<sup>11</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 138 writes, “By laying the foundation he did—Jesus Christ and him crucified—he was the truly ‘wise’ master-builder in contrast to the ‘wise’ in Corinth, who are building the church of totally incongenial materials and are therefore in danger of attempting to lay another foundation as well.”

<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the phrase “must be careful” (*blepo*) is a command that looks toward the future judgment. On other occasions when Paul uses this imperative, he uses it in relation to judgment, cf. 10:12. Kuck, *Judgment and Community Conflict*, 175; Williams, *The Wisdom of the Wise*, 293.

<sup>13</sup> Erwin W. Lutzer, *Your Eternal Reward: Triumph and Tears at the Judgment Seat of Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1998), 64.

<sup>14</sup> There is some grammatical uncertainty in this verse because the verb “revealed” (*apokaluptetai*) does not have a noun as its subject. This has led to two different interpretations: the work of the builders is what is revealed or the Day is what is revealed. The majority of commentators adopt the latter view. See Robertson and Plummer 1914:63-64; Fee 1987:142; Morris 1990:66; Kendall 1993:91; Kistemaker 1993:112-113; Blomberg 1995:74; Williams 2001:295; Garland 2002:117-118. See also *NJB*, *NAB*. Their reasons are as follows:

- 1) The noun “Day” (*hemera*) is the closer subject referent to the verb “revealed” (*apokaluptetai*).
- 2) If the work of the Corinthian builders is what is revealed, the next clause of 1 Cor 3:13 (“the fire itself will test the quality of each person’s work”) would be redundant. The verb *apokalupto* is frequently used by Paul to refer to theophany (e.g., Rom 1:17-18; 2:5; 1 Cor 1:7; 2 Thess 1:7-8).
- 3) Paul’s choice of the word *apokalupto* supports that the Day is envisioned as being revealed.
- 4) The last Day is often associated with fire in the OT (e.g., Joel 2:3, 30; Dan 7:9; Mal 4:1).

Proponents of the less prevalent view prefer to see “the work of each one” as what is “revealed with fire.” Barrett 1968:88; Hollander 1993:242-244. See also NRSV, TEV, and LB. Several arguments are put forth:

- 1) “Work” is the subject that drives the context of 1 Cor 3:11-15. Since “work” is the intended subject of *apokalupto*, there is no need to assume a change in the meaning of the idea of “fire” in the latter part of 1 Cor 3:13. Note: I am trying to discern if Paul ever uses *kai* (“and, even, also”) to indicate apposition. In other words, can the testing of “the quality of each one’s work” be another explanation of “revelation?” The middle portion of 1 Cor 3:13 then could read: “it is to be revealed with fire; i.e., [*kai*] the fire itself will test the quality of each one’s work.”
- 2) The notion of one’s works being revealed accords well with the traditional Jewish-Christian theme that not only a person’s works but even one’s secret deeds and thoughts will be revealed and judged on the Day of Judgment. For example, the verb *apokalupto* is a term that is associated with “secrets,” in Luke 12:2: “But there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed [*apokalupto*], and secret [*krupton*] that will not be known.”

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- 3) The supposed unnecessary repetition of “work” in 1 Cor 3:13 is not a decisive point since redundancy is a feature of Paul’s writing (e.g., Rom 7:14-25; Gal 2:16).
  - 4) Nowhere in the whole of Greek literature does the passive form of *apokalupto* go with “day” (unless this is the one exception). However, the active form of *apokalupto* does occur with *ergon* (“work”) in Greek literature, and the combination is found in at least one text which is independent of Paul’s writings (Sirach 11:27, at a person’s death there is a “revelation of his works”).
  - 5) Several OT passages (e.g., Joel 2:3, 30; Dan 7:9; Mal 4:1) and NT passages (e.g., 2 Thess 1:7; 2 Pet 3:7) refer to God’s judgment of fire that will one day punish the wicked. Yet, this is not the context of 1 Cor 3:13-15. Rather, the fire mentioned in 3:13 is a means of testing the quality of the work of the Corinthians. Hollander 1993:242-244.

While one’s conclusion on the above two options has no significant bearing on the overall interpretation of 1 Cor 3:1-15, the latter view is to be preferred.

<sup>15</sup> Roman Catholic scholars of another era have interpreted the “fire” as a purging fire that the worker must encounter in an alleged purgatory. Contemporary Catholic scholar Raymond Collins 1999:153 argues that the concept of purgatory has no exegetical warrant and was developed at a much later time in the history of Christianity. Certain factors argue against the idea of purgatory from the usage of fire in 1 Cor 3:13 and 15.

- 1) The purpose of the “fire” is not to *purge* but to *test* for reward. The saved were already cleansed through Christ’s blood. The “fire” that tests the “work” is not aimed at “improving the character.”
- 2) No punishment is in view. Christ bore all of our punishment (Rom 8:1). His judgment of the saved is to reward for good and diminish reward, not condemn, for bad.
- 3) “Fire” here affects *all* who do work on the true foundation; it is not exclusively for work that is worthless.
- 4) The text does not teach explicitly or implicitly a remission of sins at this testing. It does not deal with changing a person’s lot but revealing it (cf. 1 Cor 3:13). There is no suggestion of a later improvement after death in a purgatorial fire.

<sup>16</sup> The list of six words joined without connectives is a construction known as asyndeton (cf. 1 Cor 13:4-7; Gal 5:22-23). *Contra* the NIV’s addition of the word “or.”

<sup>17</sup> Rosscup writes, “The six materials in 1 Cor 3:12 are arranged to denote a descending scale by moving from a unit of three good qualities to a unit of three bad ones. The verse uses pictures to represent what Paul calls “work” in vv 13 and 14. Paul’s main point is to encourage building with quality materials that will meet with God’s approval and receive eternal reward. Interpreters sometimes restrict the meaning of the symbols either to doctrine, to people, to activity, or to character. The [proper] conclusion is that Paul in the symbols combines several things that lead to Christ’s good pleasure and a believer’s reward. These are sound doctrine, activity, motives and character in Christian service.” James E. Rosscup, “A New Look at 1 Corinthians 3:12: “Gold, Silver, Precious Stones,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 1.1 (Spr 1990): 33.

<sup>18</sup> See Hays 1997:55; Soards 1999:72-73. Kendall 1993:81 writes, “It will be a multiple superstructure. There will be varying degrees of value in the same superstructure. It will be a mixed superstructure; it will include both valuable and worthless materials.” Prior 1985:60 agrees, “No doubt every Christian’s work is mixed in quality; no doubt we all shall have the awesome sadness of seeing much of our work burned up.”

<sup>19</sup> The phrase “the Day” (*he hemera*) is shorthand for the judgment seat of Christ. Elsewhere, Paul uses the phrases “the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14), “the day of Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:8; Phil 1:6), and “the day of Christ” (Phil 1:10; 2:16) to refer to the judgment seat of Christ. These passages do not carry the same meaning as “the day of the Lord.” The issue is the testing of the Corinthian’s works (cf. 1 John 4:17: “the day of judgment”). Cf. 2 Cor 5:10; see *NET* and *TEV*.

Some scholars deny that 1 Cor 3:13 is referring to the judgment seat of Christ. Conzelmann 1975:76 argues “We have not the scene of the last judgment, but the process of disclosure.” However, the use of the phrase “the day” makes this view rather unlikely. Instead, they understand “the Day” as “the Day of the Lord.” Craig Evans suggests that 1 Cor 3:10-15 and 2 Cor 5:10 are not parallel passages. He argues that the two eschatological terms, “fire” and “Day” (3:13), appear together in 2 Thess 1:7-8 in the context of the Day of the Lord (see also 1 Thess 5:2-3). Thus, he concludes that 1 Cor 3:10-15 describes the severe testing of the churches during the Day of the Lord. In this “Day” the quality of each apostle’s work will be revealed and tested with fire. This will then establish the basis on which the apostle will be judged, along with all other believers at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10). Evans 1984:149-150. However, contrary to Evans, 1 Cor 3:10-15 and 2 Cor 5:10 are indeed parallel passages. Rosscup 1990:36-40. The categories “gold, silver, precious stones” and “wood, hay, straw” (1 Cor 3:12) are similar to “good or bad” in 2 Cor 5:10 when Paul refers to all believers being manifest before the judgment seat of Christ. On this

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Day, individual believers will receive the things done in the body, things “good or bad.” As 1 Cor 3:13-15 clarifies, “gold, silver, precious stones” are symbols representing “good” (*agathos*) materials. On the other hand, the “wood, hay, straw” are pictures of work that is “bad” (*phaulos*), as 2 Cor 5:10 describes it. The materials are symbols that equate with “work” because they have the same result. Whether the description is “gold...straw” or “work,” they “remain” (1 Cor 3:14) or “burn up” (3:15).

Fishburne 1970:109-115 argues that 1 Cor 3:10-15 is best understood against the *Testament of Abraham* (a Jewish apocryphal work, possibly from the first century A.D.). He suggests that much of the vocabulary of 1 Cor 3:13-15 is found in the *Testament* and that Paul appears to be echoing this pseudepigraphal writing. However, this is unlikely because the dating of the *Testament* is highly disputed. It is likely later. Moreover, Hollander 1994:98-99 points out that substantial differences between the *Testament* and 1 Corinthians 3 make for a serious obstacle to any theory of a dependence on the apocryphal book. Of preeminent importance is the fact that the *Testament* speaks of the judgment of the righteous and the sinner, based on works, but Paul manifestly speaks of a judgment of two types of believers. Additionally, in 1 Cor 3:15b Paul deviates from the theology of the *Testament* by affirming that even though a man’s work is consumed by the fire he is nevertheless spared. Hollander 1994:99-102 concludes with a hybrid view, in which he argues that the *Testament* expresses a very close parallel to Paul’s wording in 1 Cor 3:10-15. On the other hand, he suggests that the apostle did not borrow from the *Testament*, but only shares its familiarity to, the tradition. He concludes that Paul has adapted the tradition of the testing of believer’s works by fire at the final judgment from OT Jewish and early Christian literature. Several arguments justify this conclusion:

- 1) “The Day” passages have believers as their subject (1 Cor 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16).
- 2) The common theme of the above passages is a believer’s present life in relationship to the time when he or she will be “spiritually audited” by Christ.
- 3) Paul appears to be referring in a very general way, without regard to chronology, to the end of the age. Whether it is the beginning of the end, the middle of the end, or the end of the end cannot be determined by the passages.
- 4) There is nothing about “rapture” per se (pre-, mid-, or post-) in any of the above six passages.

All of these passages anticipate the positive completion of a believer’s redemption. See also Richard L. Mayhue, “The Apostle’s Watchword: Day of the Lord” in *New Testament Essays in Honor of Homer A. Kent Jr.* (Winooski Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1991), 245-246.

<sup>20</sup> “Fire” (*pur*) here is a metaphor just like “gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw” (3:12). In the NT, “fire” is used figuratively as a purifying agent (Matt 3:11; Mark 9:49) and as that which consumes (Matt 3:12; 2 Thess 1:7, 8; Heb 12:29). In this context, the purpose of the fire is not to punish (Jude 7; Rev 18:8; 19:20; 21:8), destroy (Matt 3:10; 13:40, 42, 50; Heb 10:27), or refine (1 Pet 1:17), but to disclose the quality of the work of Corinthians.

An interesting thought in connection with “fire” is that God’s Word is likened to fire (Isa 5:24; Jer 23:29). Thus, it is likely that it will be God’s Word that will test the Corinthian’s service at the judgment seat. If the members built in accordance with biblical teaching, then their work will stand in the day of testing.

<sup>21</sup> Lutzer, *Your Eternal Reward*, 65. Cox also writes, “When the fire comes, it ‘will test the quality of each person’s work’ (3:13). Obviously, Paul was concerned about the motivation behind the work. Naturally, it would be quite possible that the gifted person with many visible results may be building ‘straw,’ while the unnoticed member may be building ‘gold.’” See also L.G. Cox, “The ‘Straw’ in the Believer- 1 Cor 3:12,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 12 (1977): 36.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Jeffress, *As Time Runs Out* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 154.

<sup>23</sup> Cleon L. Jr. Rodgers & Cleon L. Rodgers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 353, 353.

<sup>24</sup> Kuck 1992:178.

<sup>25</sup> Paul does not define the “reward” (*misthos*); however, it is possible that the reward is recognition or praise from God (see 1 Cor 4:5). However, the referents in 3:14 and 4:5 are not the same. The evaluation in 3:10-15 applies to all the Corinthians, whereas the evaluation in 4:5 speaks of praise in reference only to the apostles. This is evident by paying careful attention to the changing pronouns in 1 Cor 1:10-4:21.

Paul begins this section (1 Cor 1:10-4:21) by addressing party divisions (1:10). The parties center around Paul, Cephas, Apollos, and even Christ (1:12; 3:4, 22; 4:6, and 9; cf. 11:18-19). Contextually, this section delineates doctrinally significant distinctions between “we” and “you.” For example, 4:1 says, “Let a man so consider *us*, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” The referent of “*us*” (*humas*) is Paul and Apollos (3:22 and 4:6). On the other hand, “*you*” (*humas*) addresses the Corinthians throughout the section. Distinguishing “we” from “you” is vital for understanding 1 Cor 4:6: “Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied *to myself and*

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*Apollos* for your sakes, so that in *us you* may learn not to exceed what is written, so that none of *you* will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.” When 1 Cor 4:6 says that Paul applies these things to himself and Apollos figuratively, the “us” portions refer to Paul and Apollos, but the “you” aspect of the passage still applies to the Corinthians. John Niemelä, “If Anyone’s Work Is Burned: Scrutinizing Proof-Texts,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 8.1 (Jan-March 2002): 35-36.

The passage is laid out below: “One [imperative: *you, Corinthians*] should think about us [*Paul and Apollos*] this way— as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Now what is sought in stewards is that one be found faithful. So for me, it is a minor matter that I am judged by you [*Corinthians*] or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not acquitted because of this. The one who judges me is the Lord. So then (imperative: *you, Corinthians*), do not judge anything before the time. Wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the motives of hearts. Then each (specifically, *Paul and Apollos*) will receive recognition from God (*NET*).

Within 1 Cor 4:1-5, the individuals under examination are Paul and Apollos. Paul does not seek the praise of men, so the Corinthian opinions concerning Paul, Cephas, or Apollos do not matter to Paul. He is willing to wait on the Lord who will render praise to each (i.e., Paul and/or Apollos). Even though the Corinthians are not the intended referent in 4:5, it is still likely that “praise” is a reward given to the faithful builder in 1 Cor 3:14. Fee writes, “What more reward, one wonders in the context of bounteous grace could one desire than the pronouncement of ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’ by the Master (Matt. 25:21, 23). Even here, however, there is the implication of something more.” Fee 1987:143 n. 42. See also Blomberg 1995:74.

<sup>26</sup> See Michael Andrus, “Building the Church” (1 Cor 3:5-15): unpublished sermon notes, October 15, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> The term *zemioo* (“suffer loss”) appears 13 times in Scripture (Exod 21:22; Deut 22:19; **1 Esd 1:34**; Prov 17:26; 19:19; 21:11; 22:3; Matt 16:26; Mark 8:36; Luke 9:25; 1 Cor 3:15; 2 Cor 7:9; Phil 3:8). The meaning of *zemioo* can be either “suffer damage/loss” or “experience punishment.” The latter sense is possible in each of its OT [LXX] usages:

- Exodus 21:22: A man is fined and punished.
- Deuteronomy 22:19: A man is fined one hundred shekels of silver.
- Proverbs 17:26: It is terrible to punish a righteous person.
- Proverbs 19:19: A man of great anger shall be severely punished or penalized.
- Proverbs 21:11: When a scorner is punished, the naive becomes wise.
- Proverbs 22:3: Fools [the naive]...are punished.

While the above OT usages of *zemioo* can mean “punishment,” each of the NT usages of *zemioo* carry the idea of “suffer loss” (Matt 16:26; Mark 8:36; Luke 9:25; 2 Cor 7:9; Phil 3:8). This brief survey demonstrates that each of the NT usages of *zemioo* refer to “suffer loss.” It is unfortunate that the leading Greek lexicon (BDAG) indicates that *zemioo* in 1 Cor 3:15 means to “be punished” (BDAG 428 s.v. ζημιόω 2) even though the word means “to suffer damage or loss, to forfeit, sustain injury” every other time it occurs in the NT. These lexicographers are reading more into this verse than Paul intended. There is no inherent idea of physical or mental suffering. In 1 Cor 3:15b, Paul states that the one who suffers loss “will be saved.” Therefore, *zemioo* (“suffering loss”) must refer to something else than punishment.

<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, 1 Cor 3:14-15 present two distinct scenarios: Verse fourteen portrays the Corinthian whose foundation work consists of gold, silver, and precious stones. Despite the fire, his work remains, resulting in reward. Verse fifteen depicts the Corinthian whose foundation work contains no gold, silver, or precious stones. Fire destroys his work, leaving him without reward. One believer has full reward and another forfeits it entirely. Context does not explicitly depict partially rewarded believers. Of course, Paul does not deny that this may result when believers have a reduced quantity of gold, silver, and precious stones. Even so, he only mentions the two extreme cases: fully rewarded and absolutely unrewarded. Paul contrasts the person whose collective work survives (an abundance of gold, silver, and precious stones) with one who lacks these materials. The only basis for rewarding the first believer is gold, silver, and precious stones. On the other hand, the second believer forfeits all basis for reward, so he receives none. Paul does not explicitly mention one with a collective work consisting of a minute quantity of gold, silver, and precious stones. Rather, he illustrates with a believer whose collective work is completely devoid of gold, silver, and precious stones. The man forfeits all reward, yet he is saved, yet so as through fire.

<sup>29</sup> The Greek verb *katakaino* (“burned up”) is an intensive word like the English verb “burned down.”

<sup>30</sup> Paul makes an obvious connection between the Corinthian believer and his work. To apply the fire of judgment to the believer (3:15b) is the same as applying the judgment to his work (3:13). Indeed, the believer’s work is simply a

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metonymy for the believer himself. (A metonymy is a figure of speech consisting of the use of the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated.)

<sup>31</sup> Paul might mean that the Corinthian builder is faced with the loss of his “work,” which burns. But this is redundant. Paul has just stated that the “work” is “burned up” (1 Cor 3:15a). However, due to the close continuity between the Corinthian’s “work” and his “reward” for it (cf. 3:8), diminishment of one leads to reducing. Yinger 1999:219 writes, “The antithetical parallelism with ‘receive reward’ (1 Cor 3:14) expects the loss of reward as its counterpart in 3:15.” Robertson and Plummer agree and suggest that the verb *zemioothesetai* (“suffer loss”) should be regarded as indefinite with the subject (*autos*) being understood as “it.” Depending upon the context, the pronoun *autos* can mean “himself, herself, itself, same, he, she, it.” This has reference to the “reward” (*misthos*) mentioned in 1 Cor 3:14 rather than the definite subject “he.” Depending upon the context, the pronoun *autos* can mean “himself, herself, itself, same, he, she, it.” Thus, 1 Cor 3:14-15 would read, “If the work that someone has built upon [the foundation] remains, that person will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, it [the reward] shall be forfeited, but he himself [*autos*] shall be saved, yet so as through fire.” The use of *autos* supports this interpretation. The *autos* is in contrast to the *misthos*: the reward will be lost, but the worker himself will be saved. This translation he shall be reduced” in respect to reward is a legitimate usage of the passive voice of *zemioo*, specifically meaning “to be forfeited.” Robertson and Plummer 1914:65.

<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting that for each Corinthian there is a potential reward. However, if the Corinthian believer is not faithful, he or she will lose that reward, not in the sense that he or she once had it, but he will lose it in the sense that he could have had it (see 2 John 8).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. 1 John 2:28, in which avoidance of shame before the Lord is one of the motives for faithful living now. See also William F. Orr and James Arthur Walter, *I Corinthians: A New Translation*. The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1976), 74; Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 74.

<sup>34</sup> John Proctor, “Fire in God’s House: Influence of Malachi 3 in the NT,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36.1 (March 1993): 11-12 suggests that Mal 3:2-3 may have been in Paul’s mind when he wrote 1 Cor 3:15. He notes several similarities: (1) The church at Corinth is called the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16; cf. 3:9-15) and the opening verses of Malachi 3 likewise deal with activity in God’s temple. (2) The Spirit of God dwells in both communities (1 Cor 3:16; Mal 3:1-3). (3) Those who form the temple community are to be marked by purity (1 Cor 3:16-17; Mal 3:2-3). (4) The coming judgment will distinguish and discriminate between the valid and the ineffectual in service offered to God (1 Cor 3:10-4:5; Mal 3:5, 18). (5) The instrument of divine judgment is described in terms of intense heat (1 Cor 3:13-15; Mal 3:2-3). This is what will discriminate and discern the quality of the varied services offered to God. (6) Both passages refer to silver and gold (1 Cor 3:12; Mal 3:3) as well as to stubble (1 Cor 3:12; Mal 3:19). However, Malachi predicted a future cleansing of Israel whereas Paul spoke of a future testing of Christians.

<sup>35</sup> Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer wrote over a century ago the following words: “Such an escape is wont to be coupled with *fear and painful injury*; hence the *idea* of this figurative representation is: *He himself, however, shall obtain the Messianic soteria, yet still only in such a way that the catastrophe of the Parousia will be fraught with the highest anxiety for him, and will not elapse without sensibly impairing his inheritance of blessing*. He shall obtain the *soteria*, but only a lower grade of it, so that he will belong to those whom Jesus calls “*the last*” (Matt XX. 16; Mark x. 31).” See Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1873), 97, author’s italics. Meyer’s disturbing words ring true when it comes to the experience that many Corinthians may have at the judgment seat of Christ. There will be terrible loss. A person who has built poorly on the foundation of the local church will be “the last.”

<sup>36</sup> Dr. Bruce Wilkinson convinced me of this idea when he spoke at a Pastor’s Conference in Portland in 1995.

<sup>37</sup> Tony Evans, *The Best is Yet to Come* (Chicago: Moody, 2000), 149.

<sup>38</sup> The verb *sozo* (“save”) is used in 1 Cor 1:18, 21; 3:15; 5:5; 7:16 [twice]; 9:22; 10:33; 15:2; see also 2 Cor 2:15. Donfried argues that the verb *sozo* in 1 Cor 3:15 has nothing to do with Christology and is used here in an entirely secular sense of “to rescue, to deliver from danger or harm.” Karl Paul Donfried, “Justification and Last Judgment in Paul,” *Interpretation* 30.2 (1976): 148. The problem with this view is that “the day” (1 Cor 3:13) refers to the judgment seat of Christ, a time of future testing for the believer.

<sup>39</sup> Fee 1987:144; Witherington 1995:134; Thiselton 2000:315; Dr. Earl Radmacher preached a sermon on this passage entitled, “Bikini Believers at the Bema.” *Bema* is the Greek term for judgment seat. Radmacher’s point is that there will be many believers who will stand before Christ with nothing but a little string to clothe them.

<sup>40</sup> Fee 1987:144 concludes this is “not...a soteriological statement...He is warning his Corinthian friends...Salvation after all is by grace, not by one’s works. But...he expects his warnings to be taken seriously.”

<sup>41</sup> Jeffress, *As Time Runs Out*, 161.