

1Corinthians 3:10-15 "What is Your Reward?"

As we continue our journey through this letter, and the truths which the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write, we come to a portion where Paul gives his credentials as an apostle and what his function in the body of Christ is.

Earlier he stated that he had planted the gospel of Jesus Christ there in Corinth as he gave them the word of God, which included all of the Old Testament. In fact, the O.T. is where Paul would usually start since it was the place which spoke of the coming Messiah.

Being on the other (N.T.) side of the cross of Christ, he would confirm that the Messiah foretold in the O.T., was in fact Jesus of Nazareth risen from the dead, whom he saw on the road to Damascus. This was his message. This was the starting point for the building Christ was erecting.

But Paul didn't take for granted his participation in this building, this spiritual house. He knew that he was being used by God to lay a foundation. This is what we saw last week.

1CO 3:9 "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."

He knew the Lord was using him to further the kingdom of God, especially among the Gentiles since he was the apostle to the Gentile world. In that sense he was a fellow worker of the Lord's. But he also realized that the work he was doing was to establish and build up the very people for whom Christ died.

And this is why he uses the imagery of a field, or a building, for these Christians in Corinth. But the thing that didn't escape Paul, nor should it escape us, is that it is God's field, God's building. This is what our Lord Jesus told Peter.

MAT 16:18 "..... I will build *my church*, and the gates of hell will not overcome it."

Christ's church is also described by Peter as a spiritual house.

1 Peter 2:4-5 ⁴ And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵ you also, as *living stones, are being built up as a spiritual*

house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

It is Jesus Christ who builds as only He can, and it is Jesus Christ who sustains His building so that it may rise to a Holy Temple to bring honor and glory to His name.

HEB 3:3-4 "Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. 4 For every house is built by someone, but ***God is the builder of everything.***"

Notice too, here in Hebrews, that Jesus is designated the builder of the house, and yet the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that God is the builder of everything. Jesus is God and only He can build the house of which Paul speaks of back in our text.

1CO 3:10 "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds."

Notice here that Paul is not afraid to establish his participation in the work God is doing as our Lord uses him. But that's different from taking credit for the work or boasting in the outcome of the work.

He begins by saying, "by the grace God has given me,.." Paul realizes that God graced him for this work. In other words, Paul wasn't looking to be a servant of God in any capacity. He was already involved in a work prior to his conversion, that of persecuting the church.

He's saying that God came along and opened his eyes to the truth. He then commissioned Paul to a work which only God can give. All of this was through the agency of God's grace.

The word grace in the Greek is *charis* and it implies a favor given which is undeserved. The fact of the matter is that none of us deserve or earn God's favor which is why it's called grace.

But notice what this grace from God is intended to do in the life of Paul. Grace is never given simply to sit on. Grace from God is never given to be idle in that grace. "..... By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder,..."

Again, the implication here is that Paul strove toward building on the foundation there in Corinth so as to build as effectively as he could by the grace and power of God to deliver to the Lord the

work of his hands so as to honor God with the gift He gave to Paul to be an expert builder.

And this was a work that Paul might have put into the category of gold, silver or costly stones that we'll see momentarily. But Paul is making the point that by the grace that was given to him he is simply doing that which God had foreordained for him to do.

EPH 2:10 "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *to do good works*, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

The good works would be those works which God desires of every single one of us, which advance His kingdom through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1CO 3:11 "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

In verse 9 Paul addresses the field or the building of God that he identifies as the church or God's called out people. In verse 10 he points out how we must be careful as to how we build which infers that our blueprints and instructions as to how this building must be advanced is through the means by which the Master builder has already revealed, which is the word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

And now in verse 11 Paul reminds us who this foundation is; Jesus Christ. I've seen it happen time and time again, when leaders are not careful to build on the foundation already laid who is Christ, they have a tendency to begin laying foundations that erect buildings that are not spiritual in nature, but more worldly, and they usually lead to a building that has a tendency to elevate the human builder instead of elevating the foundation and Master Builder, Christ Himself.

And this is where the type of works being employed come under the scrutiny of God Himself and will be shown for what they are.

1CO 3:12-13 "If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work."

How does one know if they have built on the foundation using gold, silver or costly stones as opposed to building with wood, hay or straw?

Who determines what type of work is worthy to be added to the foundation which Christ is building?

The problem is that if we are basing our futures on what type of reward we are going to receive, based on our standard for what type of work is being employed, we may be sorely disappointed. Because in the final analysis the deception of our hearts may give an assurance of gold, silver or costly stones when in fact it may very well be wood, hay or straw.

Oh, well, God knows. Yes He does. But in light of Him being the only one who determines what type of reward we deserve where is the assurance that we have any reward?

The point Paul is making is that all of our works should be done to glorify Christ, but even if they don't there is a work that allows us to know that we who are in Christ are perfect in the eyes of God because of Christ's perfect righteousness put to our account.

And therefore, even in our unfaithfulness God remains faithful to raise us up on the Last Day and give us the full inheritance He purchased for us on the cross.

Here the issue is a simple one and it has to do with the quality of each believer's work in building on the foundation who is Christ which again goes back to the means by which this building is advanced through God's word.

What some have done is to take this passage out of context and conclude that each believer involved in this building project can do works that are deemed good, thus gold, silver and costly stones, or works that are deemed less than good, thus wood, hay or straw, and as a result of the type of work we may earn a reward toward heaven with such work.

On face value, it may appear that way in light of our text being sandwiched between these verses.

1 Corinthians 3:8 ⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but *each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.*

1 Corinthians 3:14 ¹⁴ If any man's work which he has built on it remains, *he will receive a reward.*

It seems straight forward. I am rewarded by God for works of service that are deemed good, and according to verses 12-13 those rewards are revealed by God through fire on the day of judgment.

And this fire will test the quality, not necessarily the quantity, of each man's work.

And so, what some seem to imply here is that though our entrance into heaven is a free gift from God through the shed blood of Christ, our place or status in that heaven, at least in some part, depends on works of service that earn us rewards in heaven.

And so, from this perspective, it is apparent that salvation, as these people understand it, most certainly includes our participation to determine how we will live our days on the new earth with the rewards we earned.

But let's get Paul's perspective on this in what he wrote to the Romans.

Romans 8:29-30 ²⁹ For those whom *He foreknew*, *He also predestined to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, *He also called*; and these whom He called, *He also justified*; and these whom He justified, *He also glorified*.

What Paul means here is that there is no aspect of our salvation that we participate in as it relates to being part of God's Kingdom, and the eternal inheritance we receive in Christ, other than the faith we employ in that gift, which is itself a gift.

To suggest that what we do on earth in our good works earns us anything toward the eternal kingdom is simply not to understand the salvation that we possess in Christ. Rather what Paul teaches us in our text this morning, and in other places, is that God most definitely gifts His people for works of service as He has prepared these works in eternity past for us to walk in.

In that setting, though we accomplish the works, it is God and not us who gets the glory. So, what is Paul teaching regarding these works deemed gold, silver, and costly stones as opposed to wood, hay and straw, all of which will be tested by fire and subsequently result in receiving a reward?

First of all they are in the context of building on the foundation of Christ where we build up the people of God for their good and God's glory. But building on the foundation necessarily means that we are also part of that building and that every aspect of our salvation has been purchased through the shed blood of Christ and on no other basis.

Yes, each one of us should be building and each one, as Paul says in our text, will receive a reward for those works. But the point is not that our works allow us to receive a reward to be added to our salvation experience, but rather our works simply acknowledge that we are part of the field, the building that Paul speaks of in verse 9.

And as fellow workers of that field, as well as being a part of that field, we are simply carrying out works in accordance to the life we've been given in Christ. And in light of this listen to what James says regarding Abraham who was a fellow worker in the Kingdom of God.

James 2:21 ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

Is James suggesting that Abraham earned his justification by a good work when he offered up Isaac his son? Well, let's let him answer that.

James 2:22-24 ²² You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

James is saying that Abraham was only doing those things that a man who is justified by faith does; works in faith that follow salvation. In fact, Paul would make the same point in a little different way.

Romans 4:2-8 ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. ⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, ⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷ "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. ⁸ "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."

So, if our sins are completely covered by the blood of Christ and that every part of our lawless deeds are forgiven and the Lord does not take our sin into account, does this include those works we do in the flesh that are deemed wood, hay and straw?

If we are justified, as both James and Paul says, through our belief in the promised Messiah, then are we not also glorified through that same faith and promise that our sins are completely covered and forgiven?

So, where is the reward for doing a good work if both our justification and glorification is completely purchased by Christ's righteousness put to our account?

If we receive a reward for doing a good work for Christ, like Abraham, we have something to boast about, but not before God.

Each person in Christ does works prepared by God in advance for us to do. And each person will receive a reward even as we do these good works. But the reward is the inheritance that was purchased for us by Christ apart from any of our good works.

John 6:28-29 ²⁸ Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, "***This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.***"

Paul puts this work of God, where each believer is given the ability to believe, into perspective by showing how this work of God manifests itself in His people and how we all are called upon to practice these good works all of our days, but to be careful not to think too highly of ourselves in the work.

Galatians 6:3-8 ³ For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have *reason for* boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. ⁵ For each one will bear his own load. ⁶ The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches *him*. ⁷ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but ***the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.***

If we sow to the flesh we will reap its benefit which is corruption. In other words, the flesh merits nothing, just as in wood, hay or straw and it will be revealed by fire on the Day of Judgment.

But the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. This is the reward that we in Christ will all receive and those works that follow our new life in Christ will also be revealed with fire on the Day of Judgment.

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

There are those who use this verse to suggest that the one who does a good work; gold, silver or costly stones, receive rewards to take with them to heaven. Those who don't receive rewards, or at least limited rewards, may suffer loss, but at least you'll get into the Kingdom even if it's without rewards.

But this is not what Paul is conveying. What he is doing here in 1 Corinthians 3 is precisely what he is doing in Romans where he lays out the incentive for properly building on the foundation as we flee from any fleshly approach to this building project and instead pursue after the things of the Spirit in all our works.

Romans 6:20-23 ²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. ²² But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, *you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.* ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the *free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

So, what does Paul mean when he says back in our text, if any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss?

Keeping the context in mind, Paul is describing a work toward the advancement of the building, or Christ's church, as was described earlier in this section in verse 8. And we know that it is very important to build on that foundation of Christ in such a way as to bring Him glory.

But if in the process of building we fall short of accomplishing God's will according to His word, that work will be deemed less than effective for God's purposes and in that sense it will be a work that is burned up as it is judged against the perfect work of Christ done in faith.

This is similar to what the writer of Hebrews conveys to his readers concerning our true motivation for doing works for God

that lift up His name instead of doing those things according to the flesh.

Hebrews 6:7-11 ⁷ For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; ⁸ *but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.* ⁹ *But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.* ¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. ¹¹ And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,

And so, God is certainly aware of those works we do for Him, but they are in contrast to the works which yield less than the kind of fruit that is in accordance to our salvation. They are simply not commended by God precisely because they are fleshly in nature.

But that is different from saying that our inheritance is in jeopardy as we lose some aspect of that inheritance because we lost part of our reward for a work that was deemed less than desirable.

In fact, in a little different scenario of the judgment of fire on the last day, Peter reminds us of what our true motivation should be for doing the works of God as we look forward to our eternal reward or inheritance which is found exclusively in Christ.

2 Peter 3:10-14 ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹ *Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,* ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ But *according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.* ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, *since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,*

As Paul tells the Corinthians, the day will reveal our works, but it will be the final day in which righteousness dwells as God makes

all things new. But the works being described that will burn are also in the context of God's people being saved through the fire.

As Peter tells us that fire is our all-consuming God revealing Himself in judgment. But you and I in Christ have already been judged because it was a judgment that finds its place at the cross of Christ. And so, on that final day, even though our sins or certain works were as scarlet, they are made white as snow through our Lord.

That day of fire will be our day of final redemption as death is swallowed up in victory. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

Romans 8:38-39 ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And yes, not even a work deemed wood, hay or straw will separate us from the love of Christ or the entire inheritance He has purchased for us. We lose nothing and neither does our Lord Jesus who redeems that people given to Him by the Father, you and me.

John 6:39-40 ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

Let me sum up here and recap this most important teaching regarding the inheritance we have in Christ and the true work that transcends anything we could do to add to it.

There is only one work that will earn us a reward and that is the finished work of Jesus Christ who accomplished our redemption on the cross and who rose victoriously from the grave. And so, our reward, the entire reward, has been secured in the one who offers us the inheritance in His Kingdom which was purchased by the blood of the Lamb of God.

Matthew 25:34 ³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, *inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*'"

Revelation 21:6-7 ⁶ Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. ⁷ *"He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.*

Whether awards, rewards, inheritance or crowns, they are all ultimately addressing the same thing: eternal life in Christ in whom alone we have our being, without anything being added by us.

^{NAU} **2 Timothy 4:8** in the future there is laid up for me the *crowns of righteousness*, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, *will award to me on that day*; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Revelation 5:9-10 ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. ¹⁰ *"You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."*