

1 Corinthians 3:11-15

11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,

13 their 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 person’s work.

14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward.

15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

1. The Two Main Types of Judgment in Scripture

A. The Judgment of the Wicked (Unbelievers)

- **Revelation 20:11-15** describes the “Great White Throne Judgment,” where unbelievers are judged according to their deeds.
- This judgment ends with eternal separation from God—**the lake of fire** (Revelation 20:15).

Understanding 1 Corinthians 3:15 — “He himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames”

B. The Judgment of the Righteous (Believers)

- Believers in Christ will appear before the **Judgment Seat of Christ** (also known as the **Bema Seat**), where they are judged not for salvation, but for **rewards**.
- **Romans 14:10, 12 (NIV)**: “We will all stand before God’s judgment seat... each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.”
- **2 Corinthians 5:10 (NIV)**: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

This is the context of 1 Corinthians 3:13–15. Paul is addressing believers whose **salvation is secure**, but whose **works will be tested** for eternal reward.

2. Understanding the “Fire” in 1 Corinthians 3

The “fire” here is metaphorical and represents **God’s holy scrutiny and judgment**, specifically through His **Word and righteousness**.

- **Jeremiah 23:29 (NIV)**: “Is not my word like fire,” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”
- The fire is **not** punishment, but **testing**. It reveals whether our ministry, motives, and message were built with integrity (gold, silver, stones) or superficiality (wood, hay, straw).

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3. Saved, but “As Through Fire” — What Does It Mean?

Paul is speaking to **believers**, saying that even if their ministry or work fails the test, they will still be saved—**but without reward**.

- It’s like someone escaping a burning house—alive, but with nothing to show.
- The Greek phrase “so as through fire” (Greek: *hōs dia puros*) emphasizes **narrow escape**, not purification.

This does not support the idea of Purgatory.

- **Hebrews 9:27 (NIV):** *“People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”*
- The concept of Purgatory (temporary post-death suffering to purify sins) contradicts Scripture and undermines the sufficiency of Christ’s atonement.
- Jesus declared on the cross: *“It is finished”* (John 19:30). Salvation is complete in Him.

4. Theological Insight: Accountability in Ministry

God will hold every Christian accountable—especially teachers, pastors, and ministers—for how they taught His Word and led His people.

- **James 3:1 (NIV):** *“Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”*

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- If we dilute the gospel, fail to preach holiness, or fearfully avoid uncomfortable truths, our work may not endure.

5. What Are You Building?

Paul uses the analogy of building on a foundation. Christ is the **only true foundation**, but we choose **how** we build on it.

- Are you building with **truth, love, holiness, and obedience** (precious stones)?
- Or are you using **compromise, worldliness, and watered-down teaching** (wood and hay)?

Final Thought:

The verse, “*He himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames*”, reminds us that **salvation is by grace**, but **rewards are based on faithfulness**. Let’s not settle for mere entrance into Heaven, but aim to **hear “Well done, good and faithful servant”** (Matthew 25:21).

Maranatha - The Lord is coming soon.

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