

002: Stuff that Burns
(based on “Our Consumable Works,”
message preached on 10-16-11)
Text: 1 Cor. 3:11-15

In your opinion, what is the most haunting passage of Scripture in the Bible?

- for me, it is 1 Cor. 3:11-15 – I find them to be quite convicting
- I will read those verses for you
- (Unless I specify otherwise in these, I will be reading from the New King James Version)
- in **1 Cor. 3** the apostle Paul compares our lives as believers to a building
- then he starts out in v. 10 with an admonition:
- **1 Cor. 3:10** Let each one take heed how he builds on it.
- let’s stop there for a moment
- your Christian life is like a building that is being constructed
- you are urged By God, through the apostle, to pay close attention to the construction of your life

Paul continues on in v. 11

- **11** For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
- **12** Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,
- **13** each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.
- **14** If anyone’s work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward.

- **15** If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

I call your attention again to that last verse

- If anyone’s work is burned, he will **suffer loss**.
- George and Martha were married as young adults
- they went to work and labored hard, toiling many hours to provide for the family and to make a way in the world
- while the children were still young they bought a lovely house in the city and invested all their spare time and energy into fixing up the place and giving it their own special touch
- as time passed, the children grew up and moved on
- George and Martha continued to work countless hours trying to pay off their home
- the day finally came when they made the last mortgage payment, and they rejoiced
- soon after, they retired and enjoyed their quiet life
- but the quietness was shattered one night by the sound of sirens in the community

George woke up with a start and smelled smoke

- He wakened Martha and the two quickly realized their house was on fire
- smoke was pouring into the bedroom
- they could feel the heat of the flames below them
- they dropped to their knees and started to crawl
- just then the front door burst open
- a fireman kicked it in
- he dragged out Martha and then went back in for George
- just as they exited the front door, the roof caved in and the whole house became engulfed in flames
- within minutes, the entire frame house burnt to the ground

- George and Martha lost everything -- they had no bank accounts or stocks or bonds; everything they owned was in that house and was now gone
- nothing remained
- yet their lives were spared, thanks to the rescue worker
- they were saved, yet so as by fire
- George and Martha were grateful for their lives, but they were deeply shocked and saddened that their life's work was gone, completely consumed

the scene that I have just described is much like what will happen at the Judgment Seat of Christ for many Christians

- but we're not talking now about mere material possessions that don't matter anyway
- we're talking about everything accomplished in life
- if you have not lived for Jesus, your life's work will be burned up ... you will suffer loss ... yet you will be saved from the fire
- the fire is not hell
- it is God's testing furnace, of which we know very little
- What about the nature of the loss?
- is it merely not being able to receive as many rewards as some other Christians?
- or is it much more serious, such as not being able to enjoy the incredible benefits and blessings of the millennial reign of Christ?
- the Bible speaks a great deal about this

I want to speak to you about a very humbling subject, the Judgment Seat of Christ

- and, specifically, I would like to focus on the phrase:
- **If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss**
- notice that our text uses an analogy
- life is compared to a building

- if the building materials are inferior – consumable – the building will go up in smoke at the Judgment Seat
- We are going to see four truths from this passage:
 1. Christ is the foundation
 2. You are the builder
 3. Works are the edifice
 4. Fire is the test

1. Christ is the foundation

- **11** For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
- the passage is directed to believers, those who have believed on Jesus for eternal life
- **John 6:40** This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.
- if you have believed on Jesus for eternal life, then you are a child of God and, therefore, an heir of God
- as His child, you are secure in Him, and that guarantees you will be resurrected before the millennium
- You are also part of the church, which is Christ's body
- His foundation stands sure and firm

and because of that, even if the work of your entire life is burned up in the testing furnace of God, you will be saved, yet so as by fire

- that may not mean everything you have been taught it means, but it certainly means you will not remain in the grave throughout the millennium
- you will not stand before Him in judgment at the Great White Throne Judgment
- no, you will be raptured (resurrected) prior to the millennium

- I am personally pre-millennial in my position as to when Jesus returns, and I am pre-trib in my rapture position, but whether you are pre-trib, post-trib, mid-trib, or pre-wrath, the outcome of this message is the same
- as a believer, you will be resurrected before the millennium, for your foundation is in Jesus Christ who has given you eternal life
- but that is merely the foundation
- and that brings me to a second point

2. You are the builder

- **12** Now if anyone **builds** on this foundation
- to be rewarded at the Judgment Seat (known in Greek as the Bema), you must build on the foundation a life that pleases God
- in other words, you must live out eternal life in a practical way on a daily basis
- to that end, God has given you a special provision, that only believers possess
- you received it as salvation
- it is the provision of Jesus living within you, through His Holy Spirit, as your provision for living a life that pleases Him
- I refer to it as the Christ-life
- He is there to strengthen and enable you to live righteously, but He will never force you to be sanctified
- incidentally, sanctification (being set apart *from* sin and *to* God) is NOT automatic
- it progresses only to the extent that you choose to humble yourself and cooperate with God by depending on His Holy Spirit for victory
- and that requires faith on your part
- **Gal. 2:20** I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now

live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

When Jesus becomes the focus of your life, then life becomes less of an unfulfilled existence and more of a satisfying, purposeful mission

- **John 4:34** Jesus said to His disciples, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.”
- When His purpose becomes yours, then life takes on even greater meaning
- my life verse is
- **2 Cor. 4:18** While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.
- that's what Christ's work is all about
- it cannot be seen with physical eyes, but through eyes of faith
- with that as your goal and purpose, you are to focus on the building process in your Christian life

notice in the analogy used by Paul in 1 Cor. 3, the builder is not Christ; He is the foundation

- YOU are the builder
- elsewhere, Paul said, “work out your own salvation”
- in the context of that statement from Phil. 2, Paul is referring to the sanctification process in the Christian life
- it is simply another way of saying, YOU are the builder
- yes, you must build in cooperation with God who enables you, but you can't sit on your hands and do nothing
- YOU are to build by the grace of God
- AND you are to take heed HOW you build
- is your life being built with wood, hay, stubble or gold, silver, precious stones?

- the latter is strong, pure, and enduring
- the former is weak, compromised, and momentary
- one is eternal; the other is temporary
- one is beautiful; the other is ugly by comparison

heaven is made of the one; earth of the other

- one withstands fire; the other fuels fire (it's combustible)
- in either case -- eternal or temporal building materials -- choices are made by you, the builder, that determine how the building is constructed
- regardless of the materials chosen, deliberate action/effort is required in the construction process
- buildings do not just happen
- someone intentionally builds them
- and so the implication is that, in the Christian life, believers are constructing their lives and ministries **of their own choosing**

you are selecting what building materials you want, the architecture of the structure, and even the construction schedule, to some degree

- the use of the word "architecture" suggests that the building has layout and design
- not all buildings look alike
- in other words, every life/ministry will have a uniqueness about it that is determined by the builder's personality and God-given resources (such as talents/abilities/gifts)
- to whom much is given, much will be required

my building will not look like your building, and so we should never become building inspectors

- that is God's duty, for only He knows how He has prospered every man

- the important thing is that we build according to His specifications (i.e., building code)
- God is the building inspector, not man
- he judges the quality of the building by examining the building materials that you choose.
- if the work abides (remains, endures, survives), God is pleased
- on the other hand, if the work burns (i.e., becomes consumed), God is displeased
- God's testing furnace will quickly determine of what sort it is – listen again to v. 13
- **13** each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.
- of what sort is your life?
- that brings me to the third truth found in this passage

3. Works are the edifice

- what are you building?
- God is looking for that which is enduring, eternal and beautiful ... things like faith, hope, and love
- But all too often we are focused on inferior building materials – the consumables
- That leads me to an important question:
- What are the consumables?
- What are the works that will be burned?
- **2 Cor. 5:10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

every believer will make an appearance before Christ

- everyone will give an account for their own life and ministry

- you will not be able to hide behind anyone or blame someone else
- the express purpose of the Judgment Seat will be to receive the things done in the body – reward according to works
- how you live your human existence **now** determines to what extent you will be rewarded or to what extent you will suffer loss
- the determining factor is whether the works are good or bad (literally, worthless, useless, but it can also mean wicked)
- notice there is no middle ground – in God’s eyes your works are either good or bad
- what then are **bad** works?
- I am going to list three in this study, but it is not an exhaustive list by any means
- The first bad work is ...

a. **Faithlessness (Unbelief)**

- in Matt. 17 we find the story of a desperate father, kneeling at the feet of Jesus, asking for healing for his son
- the boy has been possessed by a demon, which causes seizures and involvement in life-threatening behaviors
- the man has gone to the disciples with the problem, but they have been unable to cure the boy
- Jesus responds:
- **Matt. 17:17** “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.”
- and, of course, Jesus exorcises the demon and heals the man’s son
- here’s the point: God wants to accomplish so much in our present world, but His plans are hindered by God’s people

Now don’t misunderstand

- It’s not that God is **unable** to do His will – quite the contrary
- We know He is omnipotent and sovereign
- The point is that God – in His omnipotence and sovereignty -- has chosen to act in response to the faith of His people
- Romans 5:2 tells us that we access God’s grace by faith
- In other words, God has chosen to bestow his divine enabling power to the extent that His people are believing Him for it
- That principle is clearly illustrated in this narrative
- Christ cannot trust his disciples to get the job done, because they are lacking in faith

Heb. 11:6 -- God rewards those who respond to Him in faith

- I wonder how much God wants to do in our present world, but it’s not happening because believers are not trusting God to do it
- I wonder how many unbelievers God wants to save through your life and testimony and witness
- I wonder how many people God wants to heal in His church – spiritually and physically
- I wonder what great things God wants to accomplish, but He holds back the floodgates because His people are not coming to Him on their knees with a heart full of faith
- O faithless and perverse generation!

How is your personal prayer life? How is your church’s prayer life?

- What are you trusting God to do in your life and in your church?

- He wants to do exceeding abundantly above all we could ask or think
- Christian, you will give an account at the Judgment Seat for your faithlessness and unbelief
- Those bad works will be consumed in a moment
- I would urge you to believe God and watch incredible things happen of a spiritual nature
- We find another bad work in John 15:8
- **John 15:8** By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.
- The second bad work is ...

b. Fruitlessness

- God is exalted by a life that yields fruit, much fruit
- **John 15:16** You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain.
- Interestingly, there are two general types of fruit that God expects of His children:
 - first, is the fruit of souls that we point to Jesus
 - and that comes in two forms, not merely one
 - the one most talked about is when you witness to an unbeliever about Jesus and they believe on Him for eternal life
 - but what about when you tell a believer about the importance of preparing to meet Jesus at the Judgment Seat, and they get their life in order because of your testimony

I read earlier:

- **2 Cor. 5:10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

- are you aware of the next verse?
- **2 Cor. 5:11** Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.
- the context is specifically about persuading other believers to live for Jesus in light of the Bema
- so we bear fruit for Jesus by telling unbelievers about His offer of eternal life, AND by warning believers of their coming appointment at the Judgment Seat
- What a shame it would be for a believer to stand before Christ on Judgment Day without anyone to present to Him as a result of their life and witness!
- If you are building a fruitless house, it will be consumed on Judgment Day

Our goal should be to point many to Jesus – both unbelievers who need saving truth and believers who need sanctifying truth

- But that is not the only type of fruit that pleases God
- The second one is a fruitful life – that is, a life manifesting the fruit of the Spirit –
- The outward manifestation of an inward motivation that desires to glorify God
- James 3:17 full of mercy and good fruits
- James 3:18 the fruit of righteousness
- Heb. 13:15 the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name
- Heb. 12:11 the peaceable fruit of righteousness
- Col. 1:10 being fruitful in every good work
- Rom. 6:22 your fruit unto holiness
- Of course, Gal. 5:22 speaks of the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

When a believer is fruitless, his/her life will be characterized instead by works of the flesh

- **Gal. 5:19-21** Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- as we shall see in a future study, those verses are not saying that those who commit those sins are unbelievers, on the way to hell
- they are saying that those believers who continue in those sins will not receive a reward, an inheritance, in the coming millennial kingdom

by the way, Paul doesn't give an exhaustive list on Gal. 5

- works of the flesh are any works that are not produced by the Spirit
- they are produced by our own fleshliness
- even believers can have fleshly works
- sometimes we look at the list just read from Galatians and feel relieved, because we are not guilty of any of those BIG sins, works of the flesh would surely also include:
- anger, irritability, worry, pride, laziness, deceitfulness, judgmentalism, etc., etc.
- The fruit of the Spirit will abide at the Judgment Seat, while the works of the flesh will be burned
- I would urge you to walk in the Spirit, so that you do not fulfill the lust of the flesh. **Gal. 5:16**
- By the way, the parables of the pounds and talents illustrate that the fruit yielded by every life will be different in quantity, and not to be compared to that of other lives

- While we all have the same Spirit, we have different gifts and abilities and opportunities
- Let us not be fruit inspectors in this sense
- God is the judge, not man, and He knows what quantity of fruit each one should produce
- Oh, that we may live up to HIS expectations!

Do you want to know the secret of fruit-bearing?

- The answer is found in John 12:24-25
- **John 12:24** Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.
- **John 12:25** He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.
- The key to bearing fruit is death to self
- When you are focused on yourself – your dreams, your goals, your ambitions, your plans, your expectations – you will never bear fruit
- You may accomplish much from a worldly perspective, but it will never survive the fire on Judgment Day
- We find a third bad work in Col. 3:23-25
- **Col. 3:23-24** And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.
- **Col. 3:25** But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.
- The third bad work is ...

c. Insincere Motives

- we don't have the time to look at it in detail in this study, but if you read Col. 3, you will notice that the command to do everything heartily, as unto the Lord, is couched in our ministry and relationship to others

- Wives submitting, husbands loving, children obeying, fathers not provoking, servants obeying
- according to v. 22, we are to be doing these things, “not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.”
- Our motivation is to be inward, not outward
- Why? Because we are ultimately doing it for God
- Notice that sincere motives in our relationships and ministry to others will be rewarded
- v. 24 says, “whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance;”
- On the other hand, insincere motives – (“he who does wrong” – v. 25 – “will be repaid for what he has done”)

What will he receive?

- Loss in the consuming fires at the Judgment Seat
- and that has serious negative consequences that we will have to explore in a future study
- In THIS study we have seen 3 bad works:
- Faithlessness/unbelief
- Fruitlessness
- Insincere motives
- There are probably more, but that is enough for the moment
- So how are you doing?
- Will you be rewarded on Judgment Day, or will you suffer loss?

thus far we have seen that ...

1. Christ is the foundation
 2. You are the builder
 3. Works are the edifice
- we come now to a final point

4. Fire is the test

- **1 Cor. 3:13** each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire
- there are two key phrases to comment on in this verse:
- your work will BECOME CLEAR = revealed, made apparent
- and the next phrase:
- for the Day will DECLARE it = show it
- that which is private will be made public
- at the Judgment Seat, all will be made clear
- your true motives, your spirit toward others, the quality of your works for God, whether flesh-filled or Spirit-filled
- my mind thinks of Isaiah, a righteous man who, when ushered into the presence of God, cried out:
- woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips!"

when Isaiah saw himself in the presence of a holy God, he was undone

- that is, he became unglued, unraveled, dis-integrated
- and he saw his sin, because God saw right through to his core
- When I was a kid, I was curious as to what was inside a baseball
- so I tore off the outer leather cover, only to reveal a mass of string that was tightly glued together in a ball
- a bit dismayed, but not deterred, I cut the baseball in two with a saw and discovered a cork center in the midst of that mass of string
- I was able to see the core of that baseball when I revealed its center

God's Judgment Seat testing fire will do the same

- it will pierce through to your very core and reveal the real you
- your anger will be exposed, your pride, your lust, your irritability, your profanity, your bitterness, your gossip, your rebellion, your stubbornness, your lying, your stealing, your cheating, your idolatry, your taking God's name in vain, your insincere motives, your judgmental spirit, and on and on it goes (fill in the blank with your unconfessed sin) -- all will be revealed -- the real you will be exposed
- the furnace will blaze away and all that is not gold, silver or precious stones will be consumed
- the wood, hay, stubble will go up in smoke
- here today, gone tomorrow -- fleeting, transitory
- so that the building you constructed throughout life will be no more
- there will be nothing to show in the age to come
- I share with you this convicting poem by Martha Snell Nicholson
- it is called ...

His Plan for Me

When I stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ,
 And He shows me His plan for me,
 The plan of my life as it might have been
 Had He had His way, and I see

How I blocked Him here, and I checked Him there,
 And I would not yield my will,
 Will there be grief in my Savior's eyes,
 Grief, though He loves me still?

He would have me rich, and I stand there poor,

Stripped of all but His grace,
 While memory runs like a hunted thing
 Down the paths I cannot retrace.

Then my desolate heart will well-nigh break
 With the tears I cannot shed;
 I shall cover my face with my empty hands,
 I shall bow my uncrowned head.

Lord, of the years that are left to me,
 I give them to Thy hand;
 Take me, break me, and mold me
 To the pattern Thou hast planned.

I challenge you to think on these things