

## LOSING OUR REWARDS

Some Christians believe that if a saved person enters into a sinful lifestyle and fails to repent then he will still get to heaven but will lose rewards. Their proof text is 1 Cor. 3:13-15 which say, *“his work will be shown for what it is ... the fire will test the quality of each man's work ... If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames”*. Notice that these verses are referring to the testing of a man's work, not sin. In this article I would like to show that, in context, these verses are not speaking about sin in the least but about how we work to build on the foundation of the gospel of Jesus.

Beginning with 1 Cor. 1:11-13 and 1 Cor. 3:1-8, these verses tell us that the Corinthians were fighting about whether they should follow Paul, Apollos or Cephas. Paul said that their focus should be on Jesus because men are mere servants with assigned tasks; one man plants, another waters and each man will be rewarded according to his own labour. Next, in 1 Cor. 3:9-11, he continues on to say that we are God's workers, His field and His building (His church) and that he, Paul, has laid a foundation as an expert builder and each of us must be careful how we build on that foundation, which is Jesus Christ.

Then 1 Cor. 3:12-15 talk about how we build the church and warn that fire will test the quality of each man's work. The verses say that we can -

- a) Build with gold, silver or costly stones and receive our reward or
  - b) Build with wood, hay or straw and, although we will still be saved, our work will be burned up.
- Building with gold, silver or costly stones represent good leadership and sound doctrine while wood, hay and straw represent poor leadership and unsound doctrine. Sin is not in question here.

So far, Paul has spoken about building the church with either good or poor leadership and doctrine but now he continues on to speak about bad leadership and doctrine which destroys a church. 1 Cor. 3:16-17 say, *“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you [plural] are that temple”*. The term “God's temple” is referring to the church, the body of Christ, and these verses say that God will destroy anyone who destroys His church (see 2 Pet. 2).

Then, from 1 Cor. 3:18, Paul continues on to further warn us not to follow men. In 1 Cor. 4:6 he sums up what he has said so far (from 1 Cor. 3:1) by saying that he has applied these things to himself and Apollos so that we could learn the meaning of the saying, *“Do not go beyond what is written.' Then you will not take pride in one man over against another”*. He is saying that the entire passage is to warn us not to follow men but to stay with what is written. In 1 Cor. 4:2 he said, *“it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful”*, and it is by not going beyond what is written that we remain faithful to that trust.

So we can see that this passage of scripture has nothing to do with sin. It is a warning for us not to follow men's wisdom but to use the written Word to build on the foundation of Jesus because our rewards will be according to the way we build.

- If we build with sound biblical doctrine then we will be rewarded.
- If we build with poor doctrine then we will still be saved but lose our rewards.
- If anyone destroys the church then he will be destroyed.

If we attempt to make sin the context of this passage then it will make no sense at all as words like build, labour and work don't relate to sin. Likewise, sin can't be related to building with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay and straw unless we say that we will be rewarded for good sins and lose our reward for bad sins. The fact is, sin and its reward are not the subject of this passage. The reward for sin is dealt with elsewhere where we are told that the wages of sin is death, not a loss of heavenly rewards.

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