The Judgment of the Believer's Works
1 Corinthians 3:10-17
1818

From verses 10-17, our study for this morning we're going to be able to see the fact that believers' works will be tested ultimately before God to see whether they are worthy of reward. Now this is a very important theme and a very important subject. Paul is saying here, there is coming a time when all the works of all believers, particularly those who preach and teach will be subject to a test by fire to determine whether they are worthy of reward. And this becomes very, very important to every believer in order that he may prepare for himself for that coming time.

One of the greatest motivating forces in the life of Paul was this very truth that Jesus was coming back and that when He came it would be a time of reward. Paul prepared himself for that. It wasn't that he was crass, it wasn't that he was indulgent or that he wanted for himself all kinds of glory and honor, it was that if he was going to be involved in anything, he was going to do it to the hilt. If he was going to run a race, as he said in 1 Corinthians Chapter 9, he was going to run it with one thing in mind and that was winning it.

Nobody ever honored somebody who quit. If he was going to fight a fight, he fought it to win it. That's just how it is in the Christian life. If you give anything less than total commitment to it, you have dishonored God. And so reward for the Christian life isn't so much a matter of me earning a crass benefit or of me being motivated by my own glory ultimately as it is of the fact that I want to honor the one who placed me here by giving my very best.

Paul was so motivated. Paul knew the truth that Jesus stated in Revelation 22, "Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me to give to every man according to what he has done." Paul knew that truth, not in those terms for it hadn't been written yet in those terms, but he knew it. In 2 Corinthians Chapter 5, he gives the three motives for his ministry. The first one is Christ's judgment is coming. He says in 9 and 10 of 2 Corinthians 5, "We labor that whether present or absent we may be accepted of Him, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the things done in the body whether it be good or worthless."

He says, we labor in order to be rewarded. Christ's judgment is coming and He will evaluate our work and that motivates us. In Acts Chapter 1 when Jesus wanted to motivate the disciples to go out and preach, when He said, "you are my witnesses," the angels said, "this same Jesus who is taken up from you shall so come in like manner as you've seen Him go." That's motive. Jesus is coming and He's coming to reward those who've faithfully served Him. This motivated Paul. Second thing that motivated in 2 Corinthians 5 was Christ's love was compelling.

He said in verse 14, "The love of Christ constrains us." The third thing that motivated him was Christ's work was complete. He said, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation." Three things motivated Paul. Jesus was coming to reward those who served faithfully. His love for Christ out of his

heart motivated him, and the knowledge that when he preached the gospel, people were transformed motivated him. Those three things. But the first that he mentions, Jesus is coming. And he so wanted to be accepted of Christ. He so wanted Christ to say well done. He wanted to have maximized his potential, not so much that he might know tribute, but that Christ might know that he loved Him, that he cared about Him. That he was willing to give everything.

That was what really mattered to Paul. He reiterated the same desire in Romans 14, verse 10. "Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you said it not your brother?" What are you doing evaluating other people? What are you doing making spiritual conclusions about other people? "We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." The verse 12 says, "Everyone of us shall give account of himself to God." We don't need to sit in on judgment of other believers. God will take care of that and every believer will give an account of himself. What he's really saying to the Christians who were going to read the Roman letter is you let God determine who's doing what.

We all fall into the trap of being spiritual judges don't we? We all like to evaluate other people's spirituality. And very often we fall into the habit of either downing somebody or elevating somebody. Well, you know, I think it's just as bad to elevate somebody as it is to degrade them because you don't know really whether they deserve it. The world loves to give honor to people. They were doing this in Corinth weren't they? We're of Paul, he's superior. We're of Apollos, he's the greatest. We're of Cephus and as a result of this they were splitting the church. And Paul tells them here in this letter, it's a manifestation of worldliness and carnality. They're doing what the world does.

And it manifest that they are still fleshly. What he says in this Chapter, Chapter 3 is quit elevating men. You let God determine who is worthy of honor and He will. Verse 13 says, "For every man's work shall be made manifest. The day will declare it. It'll be revealed by fire and the fire shall test every man's work of what sort it is." You wait for that time before you make your judgment.

There's no excuse for having well this is the greatest and this is the greatest guy and here's the greatest man. Paul says, no, no, because you can't make that judgment. That's not a judgment you have a perspective on. You let God make it. There's no reason for your party spirit. There's no reason for your divisiveness. You're trying to make spiritual evaluations and you can't do it. Only God can do that and really honor men. And He will ultimately. Ultimately there will be a time for reward.

That introduces to us this passage. And what this passage is talking about is precisely that time when God will reward His own. Notice verse 5-8 of Chapter 3 and we'll lead into it. They were arguing about the fact that Paul was greater than Apollos and so forth. And they said who is Paul and what is Paul and what is Apollos? They're simply servants by whom you believed even as the Lord gave to every man. They're just tools, they're just instruments, just human beings. "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase so that neither is he that plants anything, neither that he that waters, but God gives the increase. He that plants, He that waters are one, and every man shall receive His own reward according to His own labor."

God is going to do the judging. God is going to do the rewarding. God doesn't need you to say this guy's greater than this guy and create factions. You let God judge that. "Every man," verse 13, "every man's work will be made manifest." Now this is talking about a judgment on believers' works. There are many judgments in the Scripture. The Scripture talks about the judgment of sin. When did that occur? At the cross. There's no more judgment there. That's done. The Scripture talks about the judgment of self in 1 Corinthians 11:31 it says, "If we would judge ourselves, we wouldn't wind up

being disciplined by God." In other words, if we take care of our own lives God wouldn't have to discipline us, self-judgment.

The Bible talks about the judgment of Israel in Ezekiel 20. It talks about the judgment of the nations in Matthew 25. It talks about the judgment of Satan and demons in Jude 6. It talks about the judgment of the unsaved at the great white throne judgment. It talks about the judgment of the unsaved at the great white throne judgment in Revelation 20. And seventhly of all these judgments is the judgment of the believers' works. There's coming a day when we will be judged on the basis of what we have done.

Now we know who the judge is because John 5:22 says "The Father gave the Son all judgment." So Christ is the judge. That's why it's called the judgment seat of Christ. It's called that in Romans 14 and in 2 Corinthians Chapter 5. Now what is the purpose of this judgment? Simply this, every man's work will be manifested and tested. Or in the words of Romans 14:12, "Everyone of us shall give an account of himself to God." Now undoubtedly in your lifetime if you've been to various churches or heard various sermons or read books. You've heard a lot about what it's going to be like when Christians get to heaven. And there are a lot of people who want to tell us what kind of a judgment there's going to be.

The first one is the one I call the St. Peter at the gate bit. You're going to get up there and St. Peter's going to be there with a checklist and if you're goodies outweigh your badies, you're in. And that this is a judgment to see whether we get into heaven. Beloved there isn't any judgment future to see whether you get into heaven or not. Your faith in Jesus Christ already sealed that according to Philippians 3:20, you're already a citizen of heaven, right? St. Peter up there in heaven, I don't know what he's doing, but he's not hanging around the gate checking off people as they come in. Probably up at the throne glorifying God, but he's not hanging around the gate. That isn't in the Scripture.

So it isn't a matter of qualifying you for heaven. You're already qualified for heaven by your faith in Christ. Now other people say what the believers' judgment's going to be is that they're going to be punished for the sins they committed after they were saved. If that's true folks, we'll spend all eternity having that take place. Best thing to do is to live your whole life ungodly, get saved the minute before you die and then you're all right, see. No, all of your sins are cared on the cross. He took all of them. 1 John 2:12 says that and Colossians 2 says it. All of our sin. In fact, they were all future when He died anyway. He just bundled them all up on the cross and bore them all. No, you'll never be condemned. There's "therefore no judgment to them who are in Christ," Romans 8:1 says. "Who shall lay any charge to God's elect."

There is nobody that can. We read it this morning. Nobody, God's already declared us righteous. There aren't any sins for which we have to pay. While others have said no, what happens if the believers' judgment is you have to be punished for the sins you didn't confess? That's a very popular view. The ones you forgot to confess or didn't confess willfully will have to be paid for and you'll have to get zapped. The Bible doesn't say that. That betrays a lack of understanding of confession. Confession has nothing to do with forgiveness. Forgiveness has already taken place. Confession is homologeo, to say the same thing. To agree with God you're a sinner and thank Him that He already forgave you.

Well, you say what is it? It is simply a place of rewards. There will be no condemnation. Turn over in your Bible one page to the 4thChapter and the 5thverse. "Therefore judge nothing before the time."

Don't run ahead of God and try to evaluate everything. You can't do that. You don't have the perspective. You don't know whether a man's ministry is all it ought to be or not. Only God knows that. You say, but it looks good on the outside. That isn't the criteria. "Judge nothing before the time until the Lord come who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, make manifest the council of the heart." There you can get the idea that maybe God is more concerned with motive than He is with actual deed, right?

Now watch, when Jesus comes He will do this. Now the end of verse 5, "then shall every man have," what, "praise of God." You see every believer will have praise. There won't be anybody condemned. There won't be anybody shipped back to hell from heaven. There will be no one who will have to be punished. Christ bore all punishment. There will only be praise, but there will be varying degrees of praise depending upon the work of your life, you see. When it says in 2 Corinthians 5, "We shall all appear before the judgment seat," it's the word bema in the Greek. It refers not to a tribunal or a court. It refers to the Olympic stadium which was outside Corinth.

And whether it was a garland or a Loral wreath or an oak left cluster or whatever was the award, the winners went up and ascended the bema and there were rewarded for the victories. Every believer will be at the bema, which means everybody's going to get an award or a reward, a prize. Everybody will have praise, some more than others. Some will be more highly honored than others because some will have lasting and eternal work. Others will have worthless effort, but all will be saved. That's this judgment.

All right, now back to Chapter 3, let's look at the judgment as it appears here. You don't need to fight and hassle about who's the greatest. You don't need to give men honor from other men. Let God be the judge of that ultimately. I just know it's going to be this way. When you get to the judgment seat there are going to be a lot of people surprised at what's left after the test. Some people are going to think they really made a great contribution and not going to have anything left. And some dear saints out of nowhere that nobody knew are going to have the greatest rewards of all. Only God knows that.

So Paul here shows that all believers are building a building. And they're building that building out of certain materials and there's coming a fiery test and the fire will be applied to their building and only what is left will be rewarded, but every believer's going to have something left. It might just be a little tiny piece. It'll be a little bit of praise, but everybody's going to get some. It doesn't have anything to do with condemnation. All right, let's watch his analogy. You notice that the last we studied, he used the analogy of agriculture, now he switches over and uses the analogy of a building. This is strictly contractor's language, and we've separated it in several points fitting that analogy. Number one is the master builder; the master builder. Verse 10, "According to the grace of God, which is given unto me as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation and another buildeth on it. But let every man take heed how he buildeth upon it."

Now here Paul introduces us to himself as the master builder and a wise one at that. Paul was a foundation man. He was the guy who went around and started the churches. In fact, he wrote to the Romans, I didn't go certain places because I didn't want to build over somebody else's foundation. He strictly wanted to go where Christ was not named. And there he would win people to Christ. He would teach basic doctrine and he would establish the foundation on Christ. In Corinth when he came there, these folks to whom he's writing, he stayed 18 months. Ephesus he stayed three years. Thessalonica he stayed less than a month because the spirit of God did a faster work there.

But everywhere he went in all those varying places he laid the foundation. That was his job. Now he's not boasting and saying, of course, you realize that you can Cephus and Apollos. I'm the guy that matters, because I laid the foundation. No, no. He's not trying to push the party issue. I am the wise master builder and everybody else only adds to what I've done. No, no. Well, that would be to just perpetrate the problem wouldn't it? That would be just to add to the confusion that already existed over this issue. What he is saying at the first part of the verse is to disclaim any tribute according to the grace of God which I earned. Is that what it says? No, you couldn't earn grace. "According to the grace of God given to me as a wise master builder I laid the foundation." I did it only because God was gracious enough to commit that ministry to me. That's all. I don't claim anything.

In Romans 15 he said, "I will not speak of anything which Christ has not wrought." Earlier he said, "what is Paul," verse 5. "What is Apollos?" "I'm the one that planted," verse 6. Verse 7, "Neither is he that planteth anything." I am nothing. "If I have done anything it is because Christ has wrought it in me." In the 15thChapter of the same letter, verse 10 says, "By the grace of God I am what I am." And grace means undeserved favor. "And his undeserved favor or grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all. Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." It was God in me. It was God operating.

In Ephesians 3:7-8, he says, "I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effectual working of His power." He says, I am less and the least of all saints, but to me is this grace given that I should preach. I'm nothing. I am nothing. I am less than nothing. He says to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1, "I was a persecutor and a blasphemer and graciously God gave me a ministry and empowers me and He works in me in mightily," he says in Colossians 1:29 to accomplish his own plan. So he is not taking any credit. He is not saying I'm the greatest because I laid the foundation and everybody else only adds to what I've done. No.

He's saying by God's grace, I have laid the foundation. I arrived. I've preached Christ. You were saved. The church was begun. Eighteen months I gave you sound doctrine. I am a wise master builder by grace and grace alone. If it were not for God's grace, I'd still be a persecuting blasphemer. Now, notice the term wise master builder. The wise, saphos, means literally here skillful. He is skillful and he was. He knew what he was doing. When he came in to lay a foundation, he knew exactly how to do it. He had the right approach. He knew how to labor to get it done.

He had a definite pattern, a definite plan. You could study the book of Acts, can't you, and find exactly how he went about it. He went into a town. He approached the synagogue, tried to win the Jews to Christ, got a few Jewish converts, then he began to move into the Gentile community and win them to Christ. This was his plan, this was his approach. He knew exactly what he was doing. He was a master strategist. He was wise. When he built a building, his building was solid. His foundation was solid. The footings were deep and abiding.

Now notice the word master builder, that's one word in the Greek and when I say it will speak for itself in a way. It is the word architectron. And the Greek word architectrondoes not simply mean an architect. There is another Greek word, argosticaswhich means an architect or a plan drawer. The word architectronmeans somebody who draws the plan and builds the building. Both of those concepts are in the word. He is a combination architect and general contractor, not just a planner. Paul was not just a planner. He didn't say as a wise master builder, I have planned the foundation. What does he say?

I have laid it. Now mark this folks, this is important. There are no uninvolved strategists in the apostolic ban, none. In the New Testament, you don't find anybody manning the home office, nobody. There wasn't any. Everybody is out there doing it. Nobody is sitting up somewhere saying now you guys go do this. They were active. There weren't any architects who weren't also general contractors. The plans and the building were done by the apostles. They laid out the strategy and they carried it out. Paul didn't send five guys to Corinth and say now go get Corinth while I plan the strategy for, you know, the next town.

No, he planned it and he went. He knew that if anything was going to get done, he'd have to lead the troops, so he did. Now he says I then laid the foundation. I have laid it and another builds on it. In the case of Corinth, the next guy in was Apollos and Apollos built on what Paul had begun and Apollos was followed by others and all the believers really were a part of it, because he says at the end of verse 10, "let every man take heed how he builds upon it." Paul says, I started the work, I laid the apostolic foundation of the doctrines concerning Jesus Christ. Everybody else adds to that and take heed how you do it.

The foundations of Christianity beloved are laid. Do you know that? Christianity doesn't need knew foundations. They're laid. We are building on what has already been done. The word for building is in the present tense. Another continually builds on it. The word for laid the foundation is errest, one time historical past. That's done, that'll never be repeated. The foundation is laid. We are building on that foundation. Now just this note, some people would like to restrict this passage only to pastors or evangelists or teachers. And they would say it's only referring to us.

Well, in a primary sense, I would agree with that and I would say that primarily the passage is referring to those people who preach and teach Christ. They are the ones in the truest sense building up the structure of doctrine upon the foundation that has been laid. We are the ones who are continuing to teach the word of God upon the foundation that the apostles set down. I agree with that. But certainly, when you come to the last of verse 10, "let every man take heed how he build," and verse 13, "every man's work manifest." The end of verse 13, "every man's work tested what sort it is," you've got to broaden passed us and you've got to make it include every believer. Though all of us are not at the same degree building on that apostolic foundation, we are all building on it because every one of us has a ministry, is that not true?

Every one of us has a ministry based upon the foundation that has been laid and we are to be careful how we build. Secondly, we come from the master builder to the foundation, verse 11. "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ." Now here we are introduced to the foundation itself. What is this foundation that Paul has laid? What is foundational to Christianity? What is it? Is it our ethics? Is it the fact that we're kind to people? We're nice? We're gentle? We're loving? We take care of the poor? What is the foundation of Christianity? Is it tradition? Is it historical church? What is it?

"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is," whom? "Jesus Christ." Christ is the foundation of Christianity. We can only build on a true doctrine of Christ. The foundation is Christ. In a sense, people, the foundation is the whole of the word of God. Apostolic doctrine was all about Christ. The gospels are written to give us the history of the life of Christ. The Epistles were written to give us commentary on that life and to draw principles from that life. The book of Revelation is written to tell us that Christ is yet alive and reigning and will return. The whole New Testament is Christ.

Christ is life on earth in the gospel. Christ active in the church, the book of Acts. Christ's work commented on and explained, the Epistles. Christ coming again, the Revelation.

It's all Christ. They laid the apostles' doctrine as the foundation, the doctrines concerning Jesus Christ. You cannot build on any other foundation than that. No new foundations. Christianity doesn't need a new foundation. We can't have a Christianity with a human Jesus. The liberals are trying to build a Christian building without a foundation if they have a human Jesus. The Catholics are trying to build a building on tradition rather than on the doctrines of Christ. Some people are trying to build on top of a foundation of good works. Others on a foundation of ethical humanism. Some on the foundations of pseudoscience.

Some people are trying to build their lives on morality and ethics and good deeds and all of these things, but the only foundation for a life and the only foundation for corporate life which is the church is Jesus Christ. If that foundation goes, everything falls. And that's precisely what's happening in our world today. The church trying to build itself without the true foundation. And individuals trying to build a meaningful life on something other than Jesus Christ find it impossible. He is the only foundation upon which a man may build a fitting temple for God.

In Acts Chapter 4, you remember that Peter was taken into the Sanhedrin because they didn't like the message he preached about resurrection. Got the Sadducees all bent out of shape, and they had healed this lame man. They went into the temple and the guy was there begging you know alms for the poor, alms for the poor and Peter says well "silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, I give you. Get up and walk." Which is better than money any time. And the guy jumped up and leaped praising the Lord. Went through the temple yelling his head off and had a terrific time.

It was the only true worship going on in the place. Verse 10 tells us what happened. "They'd brought him before the council and Peter says to...," Peter never hesitated to say what he thought. "Be it known unto you all and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead even by Him does this man stand before you well." Jesus Christ did this. Jesus of Nazareth raised by God from the dead. This is the stone which was said it not of you builders, but it's become the head of the corner. He said you tried to get rid of this, but it's the only foundation. You see? The only cornerstone. You tried to substitute Jewish ethics, the Old Testament, your traditions, your laws, your rules. You rejected the true foundation, but in spite of that it has become the head of the corner "for neither is there salvation in any other name for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby you must be saved." Well, that upset them because he was very bold. But he was simply telling them there's no other foundation.

You may try to set Jesus aside. He's the only foundation on which a life can be built, on which a faith can built, on which a nation can be built, a home, anything. 1 Peter 2:6 he quotes Isaiah 28:16 again. "Behold I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect and precious and he that believeth on Him shall not be confused. Unto you therefore who believe He is precious, but unto them who are disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed the same is made the head of the corner." Some people don't want Christ. They're disobedient to Christ. They don't respond to Christ. They try to set Him aside and get another foundation and He says there isn't any other. There isn't any other.

Matthew 16, Jesus said to the disciples, "Who do men think I am?" They said, "Well, some say you're Elijah. Some say you're Jeremiah. Some say you're one of the prophets." He says, "Who do you think I am?" Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said, "On that

confession I'll build my church." That's the foundation, the identity of Jesus Christ. The truth of Christ, He is the only foundation. There can be, my friends, no life, no church, no nation, no home, no family, no nothing built with a lasting value unless it is built on Jesus Christ.

Other foundation can no man lay. Paul says, I was the master builder, Jesus the foundation. All right, let's go to the third point. Now once the foundation is laid, now this assumes that we're Christians folks, the foundation is laid. On top of that foundation comes number three, the materials. How are we going to build on the foundation of Christ? Now just get in your mind that you've got a foundation out there and you're looking it over on this lot. And all there is is the foundation and you're going to build your life. There's only one foundation, but did you know that there are many materials with which you could build. Yes, and you will be building. They all have a place in building. That's right.

There are many different materials to use. I think this is an admission that all churches won't end up being the same, any more than all Christians will. You know, there will be gold Christians and there will be stubble ones. They'll all be Christians, because they'll all be building on the foundation of Christ. There will be gold churches, silver churches, precious stone type churches and there will also be stubble churches. They'll all be Christians. But some of them will have an eternal value, will make an eternal contribution. Others, they're just there. Varieties of materials and I think this is an important point people, because it shows us that the spirit of God knew that there would be varying kinds of Christians and varying kinds of churches.

And you need to evaluate them in that sense. People say why are there so many denominations? Why are there so many kinds of churches? Because some of them are gold, some of them are silver, some of them are precious stones, some are wood, some are hay, and some are stubble. You say which one is Grace? We'll find out some day in God's providence. I know which one I'd want it to be don't you? And why are so many Christians there, why do some of them live such a crummy life and some of them so committed to God? Because some are gold, some are silver, some are precious stones, some are wood, some are hay, and some are stubble saints. Don't be a stubble saint.

There's a variety of materials. Now, you know, just take for example, you're going to build a building. Now, let's say it's the temple of God, because that's what...let's say it's going to be for God. It's going to be for His praise and His honor. That's what verse 16 and 17 are talking about in a sense. So let's say you're going to build this thing for God and you have absolute resources. There's no limit to how much you can spend, okay? Just imagine you are absolutely limitless in your money. I know that's hard to imagine, just imagine it. And you set out to build your building. Do you realize as a Christian that you are limitless in what you can do because of the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, right? "Now in him is able to do exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think according to the power that works in you." You can do beyond your imagination. So let's say you can do anything you want.

You go out there and the word precious stone probably refers to granite or marble. If you were going to build a lasting building, granite or marble would be good, right? A great solid granite marble thing overlaid with gold and silver. That would be a good building. But you know what some Christians do, they build it out of wood, wood frames around the door, windows and then hay. You know what that was used for? To mix with mud to make bricks. And the stubble, what was that? Roof material. And here's a guy with the same resources and the same spirit and the same power and he says here God how do you like it? Wood, hay, stubble.

Here's another Christian over here granite, gold, silver. God says well, wood, hay and stubble isn't

evil, it's just worthless. It's just zero. You're a Christian, the foundation's the same. But it isn't really fitting to put a mud hut on the foundation of Christ is it? There are different kinds of materials. You say well, spiritually speaking, John, what does it mean? Well, gold would be the very finest service a Christian could render. The most Godlike, Christlike thing possible. The most dedicated, the most self-sacrificing, the most total commitment you ever did in your life. You might have one of those little babies chalked up up there. You might have this whole mud hut with one little gold splotch on it, because one time you really did a job.

Or you might find a whole little section of that. But I would assume that gold would be the supreme sacrifice, the most Godlike, Christlike things in terms of attitude and deed. Silver would be next to that. And only God can evaluate these. And then precious stones would be next to that. Now wood, hay, and stubble aren't evil. Wood's not evil. Wood makes nice things. Hay isn't evil, it's need for bricks and so forth. And stubble, you make a roof or a bird nest, it has a purpose. It's not evil, but it's worthless. It's not fitting.

You know, there are some people who go through their life busy, busy, busy building with wood, hay, and stubble. They go to church and they sit down and they say this is my precious stone today, I'm building. They sit there, listen, go out the back door, nothing else. You know what that was. It's not bad to come to church, is it? It's good isn't it? It's good to come to church, but you know, if all you do is come and walk away and that's it, I kind of think that's probably stubble. Now if you came here and you ministered or if you took what you learned here and passed it on to somebody else, maybe it's gold, maybe it's silver.

I'm sure there are some people, you know, who say well, after all I did make a quilt. Well, in some cases maybe making a quilt would be gold. In other cases, maybe it's stubble if you've got a whole bunch of unsaved people around your house you didn't tell Jesus about while you were making the quilt, I think it was a question of priorities, right? Which is better, to share Christ with some people or make a quilt? Well, in some cases maybe make a quilt might be good, but in other cases, maybe make a quilt isn't bad, but it's sure stubble.

Have you ever seen how busy people can get in the church and they get so busy cranking out all the little programs of the church they forget that there are people who don't even know about the Lord? Or they forget their worship or their praise to God or their Bible reading and they're busy, busy, busy. And they're going to have a whole lot of stubble up there. Well, you can choose your materials, that's up to you. Let me take another step. You're building in three areas. Number one area is motive. 1 Corinthians 4:5, we read God's going to make the hidden things of the heart manifest, right? So God is going to judge you on your motives. Some of your motives are wood, hay, and stubble. Some of them are gold, silver, and precious stones, so are mine.

When I do something totally and supremely for the glory of God, what's that? That's gold. That's a motive. It's going to make the hidden things of the heart known. God wants to know you're motive. You may do a deed that looks gold, but if your motive was stubble, that disqualifies it. So first of all, the judgment of Christians is going to include their motives. 1 Corinthians 4:5 makes it clear. Secondly, their conduct. 2 Corinthians 5:10, "We will be judged for the things done in the body." The things we've done and physically that the way we live our life, the day to day conduct of our lives is either wood, hay, stubble, gold, silver, precious stone.

Thirdly, our service, our ministry, the use of our spiritual gifts. Someone said to me a few weeks ago

that he was leaving a certain ministry because they were using his abilities and not his gifts. In fact, he told me that the thing that tripped him was listening to the American Airlines commercial, which at the end says "doing what we do best." And he said, "I wasn't doing what I do best." Using my spiritual gifts rather than just my abilities. You can use your abilities in the church. And that would be wood, hay, and stubble. If it wasn't the use of your spiritual gifts, which is the supreme way God wants to use you.

If you have the gift of teaching, don't be content to type, that's the point. So God is going to judge your motives, your conduct, and your service and you're building a building with your motives, your conduct every day and your service. What kind of building are you building? It's important to think about. Now let's go to the test. Once the building's up, there's going to be inspection. That's true with any building you build. There's going to be an inspection. Let's look at it in verse 13.

"Every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it because it shall be revealed by fire. And the fire shall test every man's work of what sort it is." There's coming a day when everybody's work is going to be tested. It's just like we're all going to take our buildings up to heaven and God's going to light them and see what's left; wood, hay, stubble, whish, burns. Granite, marble and gold and silver do not burn. They're not consumed. Every man's work is going to be tested. Why? So God can determine what's left and on what's left, He's going to do what? Punish you? What? Reward you, no punishment.

Every man shall have praise. You may only have a little piece of precious stone and a little hunk of gold left in your little pile when the fire's done and God will say here's your reward. You were faithful in that little. Everyone shall have praise. You say what day is going to declare it. Well, it says the day. The day when Christ returns. "Behold I come quickly, my reward is with me." Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:8 that, "I am looking forward to a crown. The Lord is going to give me and not to me only but to all them that," what, "love His appearing." It's going to be given when He comes. And it is not a penalty. It is a reward. So you see He's simply using the idea of fire here, not as damnation, but fire fits in terms of the combustible materials of your building. So what's left, God's going to reward you for it. Pretty clear.

Finally now, last point. Paul takes a specific look at the workmen and how they build and they're rewarded. The workmen, verses 14-17, this is simple. First of all, there are some who did constructive work. They built well. They had sound doctrine in their lives and they taught sound doctrine and they built a solid building. They had right motives, proper conduct, effective service. They went pass that test. When the fire was over man they were still there. All those things they had done. Verse 14, "If any man's work abide which he's built on it, he shall receive," what, "a reward." God says, I'm going to reward what's abiding.

Whenever a teacher teaches the truth, that's gold, silver, precious stone. Whenever I teach you a principle that's truly out of the word of God, that's gold, silver, precious stone. Whenever in your life you teach or you learn sound doctrine and you obey sound doctrine or you pass it on to somebody that's gold, silver, precious stones. Whenever you are motivated by willful, unselfish love for the glory of God that's gold, silver, precious stones. Whenever your daily conduct is holy and righteous and your service is spiritually beneficial and faithful that's gold, silver, precious stones.

And God knows and God will evaluate it and you will be rewarded. You say what are the rewards going to be? Crowns. The Bible talks about crowns. They're incorruptible crowns, 1 Corinthians 9,

which is for those who are faithful to Scripture, obedient, and self-sacrificing. The crown of righteousness, for those who are faithful till Jesus comes, 2 Timothy 4:8. The crown of rejoicing, 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, for those who win souls. The crown of glory, 1 Peter 5:4 for those who are faithful pastors. The crown of life, James 1:12, for all who love Him sacrificially. Crowns. And I don't know what else. I don't know how the rewards are going to work out.

I don't know how it is that God's going to reward us unless it's a greater capacity for praising Him, for honoring Him, for giving Him glory. But somehow He's going to reward us if there's anything left. That's why he says at the end of verse 10, "every man take heed how he builds." All right, there are a second group of workers. The first were the constructive ones. The second are the worthless ones. Verse 15, "If any man's work shall be burned, He shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved yet as by fire." The fire will test and there might be a great conflagration in some people's case, but he'll still be what? Saved. He'll suffer loss, but not the loss of salvation. The loss of what? Well, all that building's going to come down. All that building is going to burn up that was wood, hay and stubble. He'll lose all of that.

You say, oh you mean all my life I was doing that thing and it was all stubble? Sorry about that. Make sure you're doing the best thing, right? Not the good thing, the best thing. Make sure you're using yourself in the best way. You know, this is something that comes very close to me. You know, I am in a position where I could do a lot of good things. There are a lot of good things that I can do. And I know how to do things, certain things that I can do and do them reasonably well. But I know that the best thing that I can do and the thing which God has most singularly gifted me to do is to teach and preach the word of God. So even though there are other good things I could do, if I were to lose myself in them, I would cease to be able to do this which is the best thing and I'd be piling up stubble instead of gold and silver.

To give you an illustration of that, I like to write and you know I've written some books. And it took me the first book I wrote a long time, a whole year, because I really don't that much about writing. And I just kind of cranked through it. And I realized that I had made tremendous sacrifices in the year that I did that. In my family, in my ministry here at the church, because of my time and involvement. I realized that writing a book that's helping somebody is a good thing. But I really went through a time when I thought to myself that isn't the thing that I do best.

And I said God if you want me to write anything you find somebody to do it, because I'm going to do the thing I do best, preach. And then it was that a man called me on the phone. He said he's a professional writer and this is what he spent his life doing and he's written several articles on our church and he felt God really speaking to his heart and he wanted to offer himself to me to take any and all the tapes that I would want and give himself totally to just writing books on my tapes. Just editing the material out of the tapes and putting them together, giving to me for a final edit. And I said, "Thank you Lord. Now I can do what I do best."

And so it's exciting. Now God's using him to do what he does best, to help me so that I can do what I do best. So that when I'm done, it isn't just wood, hay, and stubble, even though it was good. Doing what we do best. Now you'll suffer loss. You say what do you mean loss, John? What are you going to lose? Well, you're going to lose a reward. You're going to get up there and say look at that, isn't that a terrific mud hut. I mean, it all goes for nothing, you lose a reward. John said in 2 John 8, "Look to yourselves that you lose not the things that you've wrought, but that you receive a full reward." Don't waste your time on wood, hay, and stubble.

Find out your spiritual gift and use it. Hold fast. "Don't let anybody take your crown," the Lord said to the church in the Philadelphia. Paul said to the Colossians in 2:18, "Don't let anybody beguile you, bewitch you, and take away your reward." Paul feared that he would preach and be a castaway, didn't he, forfeit his own reward. You can lose your reward if what you've done is worthless. It says in 2 Corinthians 5:10, "You're going to receive rewards for the things done in the body whether good or bad." The word bad is a terrible translation. That would be if the Greek word was caucasor ponaros, which moral evil. The word is foulosand it means worthless.

You're going to be judge on what is good and what is worthless, not what is evil. And what is worthless is burned up and there's no reward. Now there's a third group of people that he talks about here in closing. And they don't build at all, they destroy. And this, I believe, has reference to unbelievers. It can be outside the church or inside the church, but they destroy what it is that God is endeavoring to build. Verse 16 sets it up. The destructive work, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and the spirit of God dwells in you." Is that a great thought? You know that you are as an individual are the temple of God? Do you know that? 1 Corinthians 6:19, "you are the temple of God." But did you know the church totally is God's temple? And do you know the church is sacred? What happened to somebody in the Old Testament who went into the holy of holies? They paid what? Their life.

I mean to go into the holy of holies was death. Leviticus 15:31, Numbers 19:20, you paid with your life. God said that's holy don't defile that place. The priest only went in once a year and many had to go through so much rigmarole to get in there it was incredible. And if you got in there and there was one sin in his life that hadn't been taken care of, he'd drop dead right on the spot. Do you think God is less jealous of His spiritual house than He was of His earthly one? Do you? His physical one? No. God is more jealous of the purity of His church. Even Paul said I want to present the church as a chased bride, a chased virgin to Christ. God wants a pure church. God doesn't look kindly anybody who comes against His church to defile it or destroy it.

But there are some people in this world trying to destroy the work that God's people are doing. Verse 16, "Do you know you're the temple of God?" All of you collectively are and "the spirit of God dwells in you." You're a holy sanctuary. "If any man defiles the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy which you are." Now here he's talking about people who would destroy the work of God. God is jealous of His own and God will destroy anyone who destroys His church. Somebody who comes along and tries to undo what God has done, somebody who comes along and tries to hinder the work of the church, somebody who comes along and tries to remove the foundation of Christ, sets himself in a position to be destroyed by God.

Beloved, there's coming a day of rewards. It's going to be as soon as Jesus gets here, so there won't be any time for checking things out after we've gone. It'll happen fast. What'll happen when you face that time? What is your life going to be? What will it amount to? I trust you'll have some crowns. You say, yeah, but I can't imagine just having a bunch of crowns. What am I going to do with them? Are we going to have a crown shelf in heaven and anybody who comes over to our place, we say check my crowns, how many have you got?

Listen to Revelation 4, I close with this. Verse 4, "And around about the throne were four and twenty thrones and upon the thrones I saw four and twenty elders sitting clothed in white raiment and they had on their heads crowns of gold." Now here you find some elders. There's a lot of debate about

who they represent. I feel they represent the church. The reason they have Stephanos. That's the word for a victor's crown. Now a royal crown or a diatoma, but a victor's crown. Somebody who's one a battle, white raiment, the clothes of the redeemed. And verse 10 says, "The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that is seated on throne, worship Him that liveth forever and ever and cast their crowns before the throne saying thou art worthy oh Lord to receive glory and honor and power."

If I read that right, that's the church casting its crowns at the feet of Christ. One of the reasons that we want to have a crown is to show the Lord we love Him and show Him faithful service, but another reason is that we may cast them at His feet in praise and adoration. Let's pray. Father, thank You for the word to us this morning. Bind it to our hearts, we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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