

## Saved, So As Through Fire

*"But if any man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stone, wood, hay, stubble; each man's work should be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire, and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:12-15).*

This passage is often offered as a proof text that once one is saved, he is always saved. Those who so use the passage, contend that the "works" of this passage represent the personal deeds of the Christian: some deeds are gold, some are stubble. And while the personal deeds may be all corrupt, the individual will still be *"saved, yet so as through fire."* Does this represent what the apostle has written?

Four times in the cited text (vss. 12-15) reference is made to a "man's works": vs. 13 -- *"each man's works shall be made manifest"*; vs. 13 -- *"the fire shall prove each man's work, of what sort it is"*; vs. 14 -- *"If any man's work shall abide ..."*; vs. 15 -- *"If any man's works shall be burned"*.

Critical to understanding the passage is an understanding of the meaning of what the "works" are that the apostle repeatedly referred to: works which ranged from gold to stubble. Were these "works" the personal deeds of the individual? Were these "works" the converts which the man had made? These "works" are the converts of the preacher and a careful look at the text allows no other interpretation.

First, bear in mind the figure introduced in vs. 9: *"For we (Paul and Apollos) are God's fellow-workers: ye (the Corinthian church) are God's husbandry, God's building."* Add to this vs. 16: *"Know ye not that ye are a temple of God ...?"* The apostle identifies himself and Apollos as *"fellow-workers."* What are the *"workers"* doing? They are building on an indestructible foundation: Christ. They are laying materials which may be gold, silver, costly stone, wood, hay, and stubble on that foundation. The result of their labor is their *"work"*. A building emerges as material is laid upon the foundation. That building is the church (at Corinth). The *"work"* of these laborers are the different people they had converted to Christ and which ones *"God added to His church"* (Acts 2:47). Yes, it is true that ultimately *"God will bring every work into judgment"* (Ecc. 12:14) and which, in that passage, has reference to our personal lives and deeds, but in 1 Corinthians 3 the "works" are the result of the preaching of Apollos and Paul, (and all others who preached the

word): converts to the gospel of Christ. The eternal salvation of the preacher does not depend upon whether those he converts are saved or not; his own security rests upon whether he, as Paul, has fought a good fight, finished the course and kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:7). But should those he led to Christ be lost at judgment he would suffer loss: lost time, among other things. But both he and his works will go through the fire of judgment. He may survive while his converts do not.

On the other hand he must remember that he is not immune from being consumed in the fire itself, for just as his converts may be either gold or stubble; he himself is gold or stubble. And, just as his converts are his works; so he, himself, is the fruit of someone else's labor: he taught others; but he was himself taught by someone else. The goal of every proclaimer of the gospel should be that he not only saves himself, but saves those who hear him. May this be true of everyone who with others proclaimers of the gospel, are "*fellow-workers*" with God.

Jim McDonald