

THE TRUTH ABOUT 1 COR.3:10-15

Ed Dye

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Catholics teach their false doctrine of purgatory and claim 1Cor.3:13-15 as a proof text.
2. Calvinists teach their false doctrine of once-saved-always-saved and claim 1Cor.3:12-15 as a proof text.
3. The truth of the matter is that both of them are wrong; for this text teaches nothing that even resembles either the Catholic doctrine of purgatory or the Calvinistic doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy.
4. In fact, it denies both of these doctrines and brands both as false doctrines, as we shall show.

II. DISCUSSION

A. THE TEXT OF 1COR.3:10-15 ANALYZED AND EXPLAINED.

1. Vv.10,11 affirm that Jesus Christ is the one and only true foundation of the church, and is identified as the foundation the Apostle Paul, as a wise masterbuilder, acting by the grace of God, laid by preaching the one gospel of Christ. Cf. 1Cor.2:1,2; 15:1; Gal.1:6-12; Mt.16:16-18.
2. V.10b issues a warning and an admonition to every man (additional builder, preacher, teacher) to take heed how he builds thereon. He will be held accountable. Cf. V.15b.
 - a. Building upon this one foundation means to induce people to accept the Christ as the foundation of their hope and encourage them to endure to the end with patience.
3. Vv.12-15 further elucidates the warning by identifying two types of work which can be the result of the builder's (preacher's, teacher's) labor in the gospel, with the consequent reward or loss to the builder (preacher, teacher).
 - a. **Work** that will "abide".
 - b. **Work** that "shall be burned".
 - c. Resulting in a "**reward**" to the builder (preacher, teacher) in the one case, but a "**loss**" to the builder (preacher, teacher) in the other case.
 - d. But, the man himself (the builder, preacher, teacher) shall be "**saved**"; "yet so as by fire."

4. “Every man’s (builder’s, preacher’s, teacher’s) WORK shall be:
 - a. “Made manifest”
 - b. “Revealed by fire”
 - c. “Tried by fire;” “the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is”; it’s a testing fire; one that tests or tries the work.
5. “If any man’s (builder’s, preacher’s, teacher’s,) WORK:
 - a. “**Abide** which he (the builder, preacher, teacher) hath built there-upon, he shall receive a **reward**.”
 - b. “**Shall be burned**, he (the builder, the preacher, the teacher) shall suffer **loss**: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire;” the fire that tests or tries.
6. What is the WORK of the man (the builder, the preacher, the teacher) referred to and which is “made manifest,” “revealed by fire,” “tried by fire”?
 - a. It is that WORK which he builds upon that one foundation that is laid, which is Jesus Christ, that is mentioned in Vv.10b-12.
 - b. It’s the work done by the builder (preacher, teacher) in the lives of people by preaching the gospel in his efforts to lead them to salvation from past sins and to the hope of eternal life, or in converting them to Christ.
 - c. When “**the day**” comes that the work builded thereon is tried by fire, some will be found to be “gold, silver, precious stones”, i.e., materials that stand the test such as metals tried by fire; while some will be found to be “wood, hay, stubble,” i.e., materials that fail the test when tried by fire.
7. When is the work tried by fire and determined or revealed as to “what sort it is”?
 - a. V.13, “the day shall declare it”
 - b. That “day” shall be the judgment day; the day of Christ’s 2nd Coming.
 - c. “The day” of V.13 is identified with the time when “the man” (the builder, preacher, teacher), when “he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” in V.15, which is the 2nd Coming of Christ, the judgment day for all men.

B. SUMMING UP THE TEXT WITH BRIEF EXPLANATION.

1. Neither “gold, silver, precious stones,” nor “wood, hay, stubble” refer to doctrines taught by the builder, the man (preacher, teacher), either the true doctrine of Christ or the false doctrines of men.

- a. Rather, they refer to the persons taught or converted by the preacher or the teacher in preaching the gospel of Christ.
 - b. These are the “man’s (the builder’s, preacher’s, teacher’s) WORK.
 - c. WORK here does not refer to the man’s (the builder’s, preacher’s, teacher’s) personal life of righteousness or of sin – but to the people with whom he has worked or taught.
2. No preacher or teacher is a mind reader; consequently, he may be misled by some who are not acting with sincerity out of genuine faith; or once converted some may not remain true to Christ and the faith professed.
 - a. However, the builder must take heed in keeping with the admonition of V.10b, and never be guilty of using anything but the pure gospel of Christ to persuade his hearers to act.
 - b. The final test of a man’s work (i.e., the converts of the builder, preacher, teacher) will come when Jesus is revealed in the judgment of all men at the last day.
 3. If the man does his part by teaching what is right, and his work (his “converts”) abide (remain faithful, stand the test as precious metals), the man (the builder) will have the reward (v.13) that consists of a joyous observation of such steadfastness, such as that described in 1Th.2:19,20; See Phil.2:14,15; 4:1; 2Jno.8; 3Jno.4.
 4. If, on the other hand, he has done his part by teaching what is right, but his work (his “converts”) fail to stand the test at that day, at the judgment day (V.14), the man, the builder (preacher, teacher), will lose this reward described in the preceding verse (V.13). Cf. Gal.4:11; 1Th.3:5; Phil.2:16.
 5. In other words, a preacher’s or a teacher’s eternal salvation does not depend upon the steadfastness of those whom he converts to Christ, but on his own faithfulness in preaching and living the truth in the faith of Christ.
 - a. As V.15 says, “Yet so as by fire”
 - b. The builder (preacher, teacher) himself, i.e., the builder thereon shall himself be tested, and if he has done his work well, he will be vindicated by the fire.
 6. While the builder’s eternal salvation does not depend upon the steadfastness of his converts to Christ, or the steadfastness of his WORK, their eternal destiny does depend on their steadfastness – their own faithfulness to their calling.

III. CONCLUSION

1. The Catholic doctrine of purgatory is hereby refuted.
2. The Calvinistic doctrine of the impossibility is also exposed as totally false.
3. The simple truth taught in 1Cor.3:10-15 is that the pure gospel of Christ must be taught by one and all who would build upon the one and only foundation of the church which has been laid; that is, Jesus Christ.
4. When the builder (preacher, teacher) does that and his life is otherwise lived in harmony with God's will he shall be saved regardless of what his converts to Christ do after they obey the gospel and are saved from the past sins.
5. But this text clearly teaches that the ones converted to Christ by the gospel and built upon the foundation of Christ must remain faithful in their service to Christ or suffer the fires of hell!