

What Does it Mean to “Be Saved, but Only As Through Fire”?

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Question: Second question: David Hopkins "Where do you draw the line between one who is a Christian, but all their things are burnt up at the Judgment Seat, and one who is living in sin and who is not a true believer?"

Discussion:

Tim: David Hopkins is referring, of course, to 1 Corinthians 3:10 and following. Let me read them to you. "According to the grace of God given to me..." This is Paul speaking. "...like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation. Someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it, for no one can lay a foundation other than that which was laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw; each one's work will become manifest. For the day will disclose it. Because it will be revealed by fire and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."

Now, David Hopkins asks this question: Ok, if you've got these people who are not building with the right materials and not building on the right foundation, it seems like, fire is going to come, it's going to test it, if their work is burned up, this person's going to suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. So, what David is asking, if you've got a person who goes to the judgment seat of God in the end, and everything gets burned up, how is that different from a lost person who shows up at Judgment Day and has no good works? Because clearly a lost person, what's true of the lost? There's none good. They're children of wrath. There's none that seeks God. Right? There's none righteous, and there's none that does good. And so, if a lost guy gets there and he's got nothing to offer, how is that any different than the guy over here who's a Christian and he's got nothing to offer? What do you think?

(from the room) First of all, I don't think everything is going to be burned up.

Tim: This is basically creating a straw man. Do you know what a straw man is? A straw man is basically a man that you can construct, and then knock him down. You basically create a situation that really isn't real. And that's basically what we've got here. Listen to me. David is the one asking the question. What we don't want to do is decontextualize 1 Corinthians 3. What do I mean by that? Well, we don't want to forget what the context is. What is the context? What in the world's Paul talking about? What David is assuming is that this has to do with all Christians coming before the Judgment Seat and having all their works examined and potentially burned up. That cannot happen, folks. That cannot happen. And I will show you verses that absolutely

show that cannot happen. What David is doing is he's taking this text and he's forgetting the context. He's forgetting what it is that's actually being spoken about here.

Do you remember what was happening there at Corinth? Paul's concern is this: There are leaders at Corinth, are there not? There are leaders at the church there. Do you remember what was happening at the church? You had schism. You had division. And how were they dividing? In fact, Paul goes right into this chapter saying look, you've got Apollos, you've got me, you've got some watering, you've got some planting, and he says, you know what? God's the One in the midst of all this that's doing this. God is the One that gives the increase in all this. And you guys are totally wrong. You know what? Men are nothing in this. Men are nothing.

But bottom line is, men's works in this ministry are going to be weighed out. What are they building with? And you know what he's talking about? He's talking about the church. He's talking about the foundation that was laid. There's only one foundation for the church. It is Jesus Christ. And we have to build the church with the proper building materials, which is what? Not wood, hay, and stubble. That's the stuff that gets burned up. We need to build with precious stones, with gold, with silver... the whole situation here revolves around what we're building the church with. What this edifice looks like.

And here's the thing, were the men leading Corinth building with good materials? Were they? Let me tell you something. 1 Corinthians 5 You know what we find the leaders were not doing? They were not disciplining sin. They were allowing sin there. That's some wood, hay, stubble that's going on in the church.

I'll tell you something else. I'll guarantee you, it was even in the leadership there, that they were saying, well, we're after Cephas, we're after Apollos, we follow Paul, we're the Christ bunch. You don't think that was also infecting the leadership there? I'll guarantee you it was. It wasn't just down at the bottom of the ranks. It was cutting through the whole thing. And that's why he's saying what he is here. You know what they were doing? They were making much out of men. Rather than making much out of Jesus Christ. And he's saying, when it comes to your ministry, if you're in the ministry, if you're involved in the building of this church, he's sending a warning. You guys are building with wrong materials.

Remember, Paul doesn't just come out of the blue when he talks about things. He speaks based on the errors, based on the problems, based on the weaknesses, based on the sin that was evident right there. You can believe it. He's saying this because there were leaders in that church that were not building with the proper building materials. And so what we don't want to do is make this an overall evaluation for all Christians.

And you know what? I don't believe at the same time, that if you ask Paul, Paul, do you really believe that a God-called man in the leadership of the church is going to get to the end and every single thing is going to be burned up? I think what you have here is a severe warning that's meant to throw and cast fear upon those men who are in those leadership positions. And

his understanding is that when he wrote inspired letters to God's people who were erring, that the Spirit of God would take that word and correct the people. And when you get to 2 Corinthians, you see correction was definitely taking place.

So I really don't believe that if you ask Paul, do you really believe that there are going to be people there that are God-called men, God-gifted men that are going to have absolutely everything incinerated. I think he would say, no, by the grace of God, there won't absolutely be people in that situation. But I'll guarantee what he's teaching is that you can build in certain ways, and that these Corinthians had been building in certain ways that it was going to get burned up. It was no good. There were a lot of things happening there. They were putting a lot of emphasis on spiritual gifts in a way that he had to correct. There were so many errors there. Things he had to deal with. When he says that they were acting carnal, I believe that he was talking from the very top all the way down. They were building with carnal materials, they were building with wood, hay, and stubble. They weren't really laying Christ out as the foundation. They were putting emphasis on things where emphasis was not at all proper. Emphasis on gifts, emphasis on certain men. They were allowing sin to go unchecked. There certainly wasn't an emphasis on purity. When you're letting a man continue in the church living with his father's wife. You've got people in the church suing one another. The rich people coming together and not waiting for the poor in the Lord's Supper. They're not building on foundations of love and humility and graciousness and Christ-likeness. They're not building with Christ.

Remember what Christ said, many are going to say to Him that day, Lord, Lord... And what's He say? It's not everybody that says to me, "Lord, Lord." Isn't it amazing how often we come back to this text. He said, it's not everybody that says, "Lord, Lord," that inherits the Kingdom of Heaven; it's those that do the will of the Father. Now look, I guarantee you this, nobody's over here inheriting the Kingdom of Heaven who didn't live a life that was consistent with doing the will of the Father. Right? And so, there is no pastor, truly God-called and truly God-saved, that's going to get to the end of his life, and he's going to come there and the fire's going to hit him and nothing in his life is going to be according to the will of the Father. That's an impossibility, right? Clearly impossible. 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 abide." You know what? Jesus chooses people. He's got a certain people for His own personal possession to be zealous of good works. We are His workmanship. How many of you know Ephesians 2:10? Who can quote it? "...God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Is that not what it says? Does the Scripture not say that God has specific works, specific fruit for the life of every one of His children, and He's prepared them beforehand that you would walk in them. Does He not say that?

And so there's nobody that's going to get there that's going to be truly saved that did not have works that were appointed to them that God's going to make absolutely certain that they carry out. Listen to this. John 15:18 "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." So, if you don't bear much fruit, then what? You don't prove to be His disciple. How do you prove to be His disciple? By bearing much fruit. I guarantee you this,

there's going to be nobody there that didn't bear fruit. Do you believe that? So basically, what happens with 1 Corinthians 3 passage is that people take it out of context. Saved so as by fire. And they immediately see this pathetic Christian come there and gets hit by this fire. And he's totally incinerated. It's all gone. But that just simply conflicts with so many other texts in the Scriptures. So many others. And so 1 Corinthians 3 read in context is definitely dealing with men who are building the church. And I think it needs to be taken in that context.