

Message #14

I Corinthians 3:12-17

Every person will be personally and critically judged by God. That judgment is as certain as our existence. If we have governed our lives by God's Word, we will be highly rewarded. If we have not governed our lives by God's Word, we will lose rewards. If we have rejected God's Word, we will lose eternity.

Paul's primary point in writing this to the Corinthians was to communicate to them that each minister would face the severe, scrutinizing judgment of God.

GOD WILL CRITICALLY JUDGE AND REWARD EVERY MINISTER AND HIS MINISTRY, AND THIS REALITY SHOULD CAUSE EVERY BELIEVER TO CONTINUALLY EVALUATE HIS OWN LIFE.

This passage clearly teaches that ministers who obey God's Word will receive rewards. Ministers who do not obey God's Word will lose rewards. Ministers who harm God's work will lose eternity.

Now you will immediately observe that there are four "if" clauses in this context: **3:12, 14, 15, 17**. All of these "if" clauses assume reality. In other words, every minister will be judged and that is the reality; but the type of rewards he will receive is conditional depending on the type of ministry he had.

REALITY #1 – Every minister will be critically judged. **3:12-13**

Fact #1 - This judgment will be based on the quality of the work. **3:12**

It is quite apparent from this verse that God is much more interested in the quality of the materials rather than the quantity of them.

Gold, silver and precious stones represent ministry that in God's estimation is high quality, valuable and durable. Wood, hay and straw represent ministry that in God's estimation is low quality, cheap and expendable. A building made of wood, hay or straw would be the easiest and cheapest to build; but it would also be the easiest to destroy.

If a minister lined up his life and ministry with the eternal Word of God, which would include his own life, his instruction, his doctrine, his attitudes and his actions, his work will stand and he will receive great rewards.

If a minister did not line up his life and ministry with the Word of God, if he did things his way and played by his own rules, even though he may have impressive numbers, he will lose rewards. Quality of work will be judged, not quantity.

Fact #2 - This judgment will be based on a critical inspection. **3:13a**

There are three key words in this verse that testify that God will critically scrutinize and judge every phase of a minister's work: "evident, show and revealed."

The word "evident" means to open and make visible. The word "show" means to manifest what is inside. The word "reveal" means to completely uncover. Combined, these words speak of a very critical judgment in which God brings to full view, not just the external work, but the internal thoughts behind the work. Everything about the minister and his ministry will be put on full display for accurate judgment.

Fact #3 – This judgment will be based on a fiery examination. **3:13b**

God will purge out ANYTHING impure so that only that which is pure will be left.

Let no believer think that his righteousness or his rebellion is going unnoticed. Let no believer think that his righteousness or his rebellion will go unrewarded. People can fool other people, people can impress other people, but no one can fool or impress God.

He sees what is really going on in the heart and in the life and His judgment will be based on this critical evaluation.

REALITY #2 – Some ministers will receive rewards. **3:14**

The word "reward" speaks of divine wages, divine rewards, and a divine paycheck for service and work.

Crown #1 - The incorruptible crown for living a disciplined life. I Cor. 9:25

Crown #2 - The rejoicing crowning for living an impacting life. I Thess. 2:19

Crown #3 - The righteousness crown for loving Christ's return. II Tim. 4:8

Crown #4 - The life crown for enduring trials. James 1:12

Crown #5 - The glory crown for elders who were faithful. I Pet. 5:4

REALITY #3 – Some ministers will lose rewards. **3:15**

The words "suffer loss" are words that mean to forfeit.

This potential to lose rewards is true for all believers (i.e. 2 John 8). One can go to heaven and be an eternal loser in that he lost all his rewards forever.

REALITY #4 – Some ministers will be eternally damned. **3:16-17**

In **verse 16**, Paul calls the people of God, the believers in the church, the temple of God.

If a minister “destroys” the temple of God, God will “destroy” him. That word “destroy” means to destroy someone by corrupting him or defiling him. What Paul is saying is if any minister corrupts or defiles God’s people and leads them in an unhealthy or unholy direction, other than what is righteous and true, God will destroy him.

This verse clearly proves that a minister is going to be seriously judged for the type of impact he made on God’s people (i.e. James 3:1).

On the day we face God, we will either receive rewards, lose rewards or be condemned to hell.

Which will it be for us?