

First Rebuttal to James White on:

Purgatory in 1 Corinthians 3:15

The following is a Internet public chat room conversation between Dr. James R. White and a man named Jerry. This dialogue was sent to me so that I could respond to the assertions by Dr. White regarding the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 3:12-17. This passage is central regarding the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory. St. Augustine had used it as Scriptural evidence for Purgatory.

In several debates, articles and books, I have produced a detailed exegesis of 1 Corinthians 3:12-17. In doing so, I have shown that a proper interpretation of the passage compels one to accept the consensus of Catholic thought that 1 Corinthians 3:12-17 is indeed teaching the concept of Purgatory.

Dr. James White, with whom I have had a recent debate regarding Purgatory on WMCA in New York on April 7, 2000, insists that 1 Corinthians 3 does not teach Purgatory. With the limited time and format that was available to me on that radio program, I countered Dr. White's argument by using several pieces of evidence. The first is the lexical derivation of the Greek word "zemioo" (normally translated "suffer loss" in most English translations of 1 Cor 3:15). The second is Paul's mention in 1 Cor. 3:17 of God's "destroying" man for man's "destroying" of the temple. There were other material facts I brought to the discussion, but they will be mentioned incidentally in the following response.

The chat room conversation begins with Jerry posing a challenge to Dr. White. Dr. White responds under the name NA27. My responses to Dr. White's statements to Jerry will be introduced below by "R. Sungenis" and [highlighted in blue](#).

Jerry: "...from what I understand Bob [Robert Sungenis] is saying that since the man is, or part of the 'temple of God' he is a Christian yet can 'destroy' that temple and thus God would then destroy him, i.e. send him to hell."

NA27: "I know Bob thinks there are sons of God in hell."

NA27: "I am sorry he thinks so, and more sorry he thinks that is what the passage is about, but anyway...."

R. Sungenis: First, Dr. White's answer attempts to bring in an irrelevant issue. The passage does not refer to "sons of God," and thus answering the question in such a manner unnecessarily brings in what I would call the "code" words of the Protestant theology so as to engender a certain reaction from Dr. White's Protestant audience. On the surface, to claim that a "son of God" is in Hell doesn't sound right, and knowing this, Dr. White exploits it to his advantage.

Conversely, Jerry's question to Dr. White is properly representing the interpretation I use; an interpretation that addresses the context of 1 Cor 3, namely, that the understanding of verse 15 is directly contingent on the understanding of verse 17. Since verse 17 speaks of God "destroying

those who destroy the temple," then we have what is commonly known as a "judgment" context. Not only is it a judgment context, but it is judgment of the worst kind - God "destroying" the perpetrator. The ultimate sense of the "destroying," of course, is eternal damnation, for that is the way "destruction" is treated in the New Testament. (Even if it were not speaking of eternal damnation, the man of verse 17 is, nevertheless, punished severely for his "destroying of the temple").

The dialogue continues:

Jerry: "What is the temple that can be destroyed in this passage?"

NA27: "Did Sungenis deal with the fact that "you" at 3:16 is plural?"

Jerry: "...yes...I am not seeing the connection though."

NA27: "I thought you were saying that Sungenis makes the temple = a Christian. The temple is the church, in this context."

Jerry: "He does say that."

Jerry: "He is saying the man is a Christian."

NA27: "Oh, OK, I follow you."

NA27: "So Christians destroy the Church?"

NA27 You think Paul thought his enemies were Christians? :-)

Jerry: "CAN destroy."

Jerry: "I guess if he is warning them."

NA27 "Don't see any relevance there. Surely wasn't Paul's point, that's for sure."

R. Sungenis: Dr. White's answer represents the typical response when Protestants are posed with the challenge that the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 3 is speaking about and to Christians. Since Dr. White's theology will not allow Christians to be threatened either with the loss of salvation or punishment in the afterlife (due to the Protestant belief in "once saved, always saved"), then any suggestion that the judgment material in 1 Cor 3 is directed to a Christian is summarily dismissed. This dismissal is usually done, as Dr. White did above, by trying to make ludicrous the notion that Paul either threatened or warned the Corinthians about losing their salvation. In this particular instance, Dr. White attempts to change the issue to one of Paul's threatening the Corinthians with punishment to one of the Corinthians being an "enemy" of Paul's, but this is merely a ploy to take the focus off of the real issue.

Let me illustrate: Already in 1 Corinthians 1:11-13 Paul points out the "divisions" in the Corinthian Church:

11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brethren. 12 What I mean is that each one of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

These "divisions" were very prevalent in the Corinthians church, and they become the very reason that Paul makes the threatening remarks to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 3:3. He writes:

3 for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men? 4 For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely men?

The above discussion about "jealousy and strife among you" is the context with which Paul begins the chapter, before he gets to the verses in question, 1 Cor. 3:12-17. Much later, in the second epistle to the Corinthians, we notice that the Corinthians have not improved much, still having the same problems of "jealousy and strife":

20 For I fear that perhaps I may come and find you not what I wish, and that you may find me not what you wish; that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.

Next, notice in the next verse, 1 Cor. 12:21, how Paul classifies this behavior - in the same category of sin as he does other sins:

21 I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned before and have not repented of the impurity, immorality, and licentiousness which they have practiced.

In 2 Corinthians 13:5 notice that, due to their sins, Paul warns them to examine themselves:

5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? (KJV).

The word "reprobates," here translated correctly by the KJV, is the Greek word *adokimos*, which in the New Testament, refers to an apostate under judgment (Rom 1:28; 2 Tim 3:8; Tit 1:16; Heb 6:8).

Not only that, but an examination of the first letter to the Corinthians reveals that in almost every chapter Paul warns against their bad behavior. In the midst of these warnings, he compares the Corinthians to the ancient Israelites, showing them that just as the Israelites were judged for their sins, so the Corinthians can be judged as well:

1 I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same supernatural food 4 and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness. 6 Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to dance." 8 We must not indulge in immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put the Lord to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents; 10 nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. 12 Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

Notice above that, after Paul warns the Corinthians that they could fall into the same sins as the Israelites, he completes his thoughts by warning them that unless they stop sinning then they could indeed "fall."

In order to dismiss ideas of sin and judgment from the context of 1 Cor 3:12-17, Protestants (like Dr. White) who believe in the theological position of "once saved, always saved," need to eliminate any notion of sin from the passage. Thus, we will find Dr. White making such claims as the following in his books:

"What is judged is the sort or kind of works the Christian has done. Sins, and their punishments, are not even mentioned...The believer has already been judged with reference to sin in Christ Jesus [read: "once saved, always saved"], and has passed out of death into life, never to come into judgment for sin again (John 5:24). The believer's sins were judged in Christ Jesus. The remaining judgment is not about salvation, but it is about reward" (*The Fatal Flaw*, 1990, pp. 179-180).

It is quite evidence that Dr. White is in a desperate attempt to empty 1 Cor 3:15 of any notion of sin. Unfortunately for him, it is quite obvious that, in the Corinthian epistle, Paul mentions the word "sin" quite often. In fact, as we have seen, it is the very sins of "jealousy and quarreling" that begin the context of building the temple of God in 1 Cor 3.

We also know that the "building" and "temple" imagery Paul uses refers directly to the divisive sins in the Corinthian Church, since right after this imagery Paul continues with the issue of divisions. For example, in 1 Corinthians 3:21-22, just four verses after mentioning God "destroying those who destroy the temple," Paul reiterates the Corinthian's problem of esteeming men:

21 So let no one boast of men. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours;

Thus we know, without any doubt, that the sinful divisions in the Corinthian Church were the main issue on Paul's mind. Applying the "division" theme to the building imagery that Paul uses in 1 Cor 3:12-17, we understand that those who were trying to build the Church by false

allegiances and alliances were, in fact, "destroying" the Church, for, as Jesus said, "a house divided against itself cannot stand." Those who were perpetuating the divisive cliques (e.g., "I am of Apollos," "I am of Paul," "I am of Cephas," "I am of Christ") were those who, in the imagery of Paul, were "building with wood, hay and straw." Those building with such divisive material were in sin.

Now, let's continue on with the dialogue of Jerry and Dr. White:

Jerry: "Here is another approach."

Jerry: "Is the 'man' in verse 14 and 15 a Christian?"

NA27: "Yes, they are....both BUILT. The one of 17 does not. So?"

Jerry: "verse 16 says that the 'man' is a 'temple' though."

NA27: "Buzz. :-)"

NA27: "You just sunk your argument."

Jerry: Ok. Show me.

NA27: "'You' in 16 is plural.

NA27: "You = church collective, in its entirety."

NA27: "Not singular, 'the man.'"

NA27: "In fact, throughout the passage it actually isn't 'man,' either.

NA27 "It is 'a certain one.'"

NA27: "tis/ti"

NA27: "In Greek."

R. Sungenis: Dr. White is trying to make the argument that because various verbs and nouns in verses 16-17 are in the plural, then they cannot be referring to the singular "if anyone" of verse 17. But here Dr. White traps himself. For verses 14 and 15 ALSO use the singular in referring to those who receive a reward for good work, and those who suffer loss but are still saved, respectively. Now, if, as Dr. White argues, verse 16's plural "you" cannot refer to anyone addressed in the singular, then he must also claim that verse 16's plural "you" cannot apply to either verses 14, 15 or 17, since all of them, by the use of "if anyone," are in the singular. Yet these verses, according to Paul, constitute the only categories of those in the Corinthian Church:

a) If anyone's work survives;

- b) If anyone's work is burned up;
- c) If anyone destroys;

Moreover, notice that Paul continues with "If anyone..." in verse 18.

18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise.

In other words, Paul is telling the Corinthians that he among them who does the things that Paul described in verse 17 (i.e., "destroying" the temple) should not deceive himself, for God 'catches the wise in their craftiness' and 'knows that the reasonings of the wise are useless.' We know that the Old Testament axiom that God "catches the wise in their craftiness" and "knows that the reasonings of the wise are useless" is directed against the Corinthians, since in the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians Paul quotes, to the Corinthians, six passages from the Old Testament concerning false wisdom. They are as follows:

a) 1 Cor. 1:19: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." Paul takes this quote from Isaiah 29:14, in a context of God's judgment in which Isaiah states that the Lord has taken away the understanding of the prophets and seers (v. 10). He quotes the Lord as saying that the people of Israel honor him with their lips but their hearts are far from him. For reverence to God they obey the tradition of men (v. 13). He sternly warns those who hide their wicked ways from the Lord and say, "who sees us?" Isaiah states that in their pride and false wisdom they were making themselves equal to their maker and were claiming that God did not have any knowledge about them (v. 16).

b) 1 Cor. 1:31: "Whoever boasts should boast in the Lord." Paul introduces this passage by referring to how God chooses the foolish, weak, and base things of the world to confound the wise so that no one can boast before God (vv. 28-29). He takes the quote from Jeremiah 9:23, in a context forecasting God's judgment upon Israel. The people were boasting of their wisdom, might, and riches, but had forgotten God and the practice of the virtues of loving kindness, justice, and righteousness (v. 24). Paul says similar things of the Corinthians in the context in question (cf., 1 Cor. 4:8-10).

c) 1 Cor. 2:9: "The eye has not seen nor the ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for them that love him." The preface to his quotation is the contrast between the wisdom of men and the power and wisdom of God. God's wisdom is mysterious, hidden, and predetermined (1 Cor. 2: 4-7). As in the crucifixion of Christ, in which no one had even an inkling of God's secret plan or ultimate purpose (v. 8), Paul quotes from Isaiah 64:3, which focuses on those who wait patiently for the hidden wisdom of God to answer their call in an unexpected and miraculous way. Paul also states that God hides his face from evildoers (v. 7).

d) 1 Cor. 2:16: "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he should instruct him." Paul does not introduce this statement with the normal phrasing, "it is written," as he does the other quotations, but this statement is an allusion to Isaiah 40:13. The chapter contains beautiful

imagery describing the greatness of God as expressed in the creation. God regards the nations as "less than nothing" (v. 17) and considers the inhabitants of earth as "grasshoppers" (v. 22).

e) 1 Cor. 3:19: "I will catch the wise in their own craftiness." Paul takes this quote from Job 5:13. It is similar to 1 Cor. 1:19 cited above in that it demonstrates the greatness of God and the foolishness of men. Although men think they are wise, God is wiser and uses their own pseudo-wisdom to trap them.

f) 1 Cor. 3:20: "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise that they are vain." Paul takes this quote from Psalm 94:11 in a context in which the people are complaining that God does not pay attention to them when their enemies attack. God tells them not to worry, since the wisdom and plans of their attackers are nothing compared to God's plans. God will come to the rescue and at the same time teach the righteous his wise and mysterious ways.

g) We could also add 1 Cor. 4:5: "The Lord...who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and disclose the motives of the heart..." This passage alludes to a saying of Jesus in Luke 12:1-3 which warns of Pharisaical hypocrisy, and states that there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed at judgment day. This correlates with Paul's warning in 1 Cor. 3:13 of the fire that will test the quality of each man's work, and with the theme of the above citations that God is wiser than men, upsetting their plans and exposing their vain thoughts.

As we have seen earlier, immediately following in 1 Cor 3:21-22, Paul reiterates warning against "divisions." Hence, it is unmistakable that the quotation from the Old Testament about God "catching the wise" refers directly to the so-called "wise" members of the Corinthian church who were destroying the church by their insistence on divisive cliques.

For a bird's eye view of why Paul is mixing in the ideas of pseudo-wisdom with the false allegiances manufactured by the Corinthians, we only need look at the subject matter Paul introduces in 1 Cor 1:18 - 2:16, right after he spoke about the "divisions" in the Church from 1 Cor 1:11-13.

For example, in verses 1:18-19 Paul quotes the Old Testament concerning false wisdom, and he condemns those who boast in it. This is very similar to what Paul later says in 1 Cor 3:19-22 where he mixes the themes of false wisdom and divisions.

Thus, we see a continual thread throughout these three chapters, for we see the same themes: false wisdom and false allegiances. Accordingly, what we see in Paul's account is that building the temple with "wood, hay and straw" is both creating divisions in the Church and relying on false wisdom - - something the citizens of Corinth, surrounded by Greek philosophy, were continually tempted to bring into the church.

In 1 Cor 3:18-22, then, we see that Paul speaks directly to Corinthian Christians, warning them against false wisdom and false allegiances. He does this without any break in the context (that is, there is no indication from Paul saying that in one place he is talking to Christians (as Dr. White proposes for verses 12-16) and is then shifting to non-Christians (as Dr. White proposes for verse 17); and is going back to addressing Christians (as Dr. White would propose for verses 18-22).

There is simply no reference to non-Christians in the entire context, and if we were to go further into chapter four of 1 Corinthians we would see the same. Paul's message is entirely to the Christians in Corinthian church, and Paul never claims, or bases any argumentation, that there are non-Christians in the Corinthian Church.

Thus, where does Dr. White get the idea that verses 12-16 and verses 18-22 are speaking about Christians, but verse 17 is speaking about a non-Christian? Obviously, he cannot be getting it from the context. As is usually the case, Dr. White acquires his beliefs from his Reformed theology, a theology which forces him to eliminate the man of verse 17 from any association with Christianity, for Reformed theology will not allow Dr. White to accept the possibility that a man can at one time be a true Christian but then fall from his Christian faith and subsequently "destroy" the temple of God.

Yet, in order to make it appear as if he is able to support his from the context, Dr. White appeals to the Greek grammar, particularly the issue of singulars and plurals, but, as I have seen in many instances of Dr. White's exegesis, this is simply a misuse of Greek grammar foisted upon someone like Jerry who does not know Greek grammar. In fact, we have seen that the Greek grammar, being that it indicates that each of the personages in verses 14, 15, 17 and 18 are all addressed in the singular, respectively, there is simply no room for Dr. White to make a distinction as to whom the verses are addressing.

Now, let's get back to the conversation between Jerry and Dr. White:

Jerry: "So let me get this strait, contrary to what Sungenis says, verse 17 is not a particular person like it is in 14 and 15?"

NA27: "I didn't say that. :-)"

NA27: "You made an incorrect statement."

NA27: "You said that the text identifies a *man* as the 'temple.'"

NA27: "I said it does not. It uses a plural pronoun, not a singular."

R. Sungenis: This is very revealing. Jerry's comment shows that he was beginning to penetrate the issue, but Dr. White cleverly deflected it by changing the content of Jerry's question. Granted, Jerry had introduced the idea of the "temple" and Dr. White had attempted to refute it by an appeal to singulars and plurals, but in the above exchange Jerry did not argue with Dr. White's explanation about the singulars and plurals, and thus, as far as Jerry was concerned, that issue had expired.

In the above statement, Jerry introduces a new issue, which is, if the man of verse 17 is a singular man, is it not true that the man of verse 14 and the man of verse 15 are singular men, since all three verses use the same language? This is a legitimate question, and by it Jerry has demolished Dr. White's argument. Dr. White can't have his cake and eat it too. If he wants his "singular/plural" argument to be applied to the man of verse 17, then it must also be applied to

the men of verses 14 and 15, respectively, but then there is no one left to comprise the "temple," which Dr. White maintains is a plurality, not a singularity.

Dr. White continues:

NA27: "I had already pointed out that tis/ti is used to describe "a certain one" in 14, 15, and 17."

NA27: "In 14 and 15 we are talking about Christians, because they are saved, and they build upon the foundation."

Jerry: "ok"

NA27: "In 17 we are not talking about a Christian, for the person is lost, and they do not build, but destroy."

NA27: "Do you have a rebuttal of those facts? :-)"

R. Sungenis: Again, it is obvious that Dr. White is not exegeting from the text, per se, but from his theology. His theology insists that a Christian cannot "destroy" the temple. That a Christian cannot destroy the temple is the same reason that Dr. White says that the bad works of the Christian presented in 1 Cor 3:14-15 are not sins, as we saw earlier in the quote I extracted from Dr. White's book, *The Fatal Flaw*. But as we have seen in examining both the context of 1 Cor 1-3, as well as a look into other parts of the Corinthian epistles, Christians can and, indeed do, sin. They are likewise held accountable for those sins, which is precisely what 1 Cor 3:12-17 is discussing.

Back to the discussion:

Jerry: "Why the distinction though? You have what seems a continuous 'If a man', 'If a man,' 'If a man'?"

Jerry: "No. Not seeking to refute anything NA. Just to understand believe it or not."

NA27: "I've listed the differences three times. In 14 and 15 the "certain one" BUILDS, correct?"

Jerry: "Ok."

NA27: "They build upon the foundation, correct, which is Christ Jesus?"

NA27: "The "certain one" BUILDS in 14 and 15 but NOT 17; the 'certain one' DESTROYS in 17. The *text* differentiates between them."

R. Sungenis: At this point Dr. White refers to the "text." He defends his thesis that the men of verses 14 and 15 are Christian, but that the man in verse 17 is not, because, he says, "the *text* differentiates between them." But it goes without saying that the text differentiates between them. The issue is HOW does the text differentiate. Obviously, two are building and one is

destroying, but how does that differentiation show or prove that the two men in verses 14-15 are Christians and the one in verse 17 is not? The answer is: it doesn't. Dr. White is simply reading into the passage his Reformed theology. Dr. White wants the text to differentiate between Christian and non-Christian, but he will search in vain for any such indication in the context. From verses 1-23 of Chapter 3 there is a continuous thread of warning and punishment issued to the Corinthian church without any indication of a break in the audience.

Dr. White adds:

NA27: "The use of 'tis/ti' makes it a general statement....if anyone does X, this will happen as a result..."

R. Sungenis: At this point Dr. White appeals to the "general" language of verse 17 and assumes that the generality means that Christians are excluded. But his answer is self-defeating, for if we use Dr. White's principle that the language is "general," then that means it would have to apply to both groups, Christian and non-Christian. "General" means that it cannot specify one or the other. That is, "If Christians do X, this will happen as a result"; and "If non-Christians do X, this will happen as a result."

In reality, the "general" language "If anyone does X, this will happen as a result," is a good indicator that all three categories of people (verse 14, verse 15, and verse 17) all speak to the same general group of people, the Corinthians, since each verse has precisely the same formula: "If anyone does X, this will happen as a result." If, as Dr. White claims, there were a "differentiation" between the verses, we would expect that one of them would use a different formula.

The dialogue continues:

Jerry: "ok"

Jerry: "But how does that make the 'certain one' not a believer?"

Jerry: "In this passage alone that is."

NA27: "Well, Paul says the ones in 14-15 are saved, right?"

NA27: "He does not say the one in 17 is saved."

NA27: "Next, Christians build upon the foundation of Christ Jesus. Lost folks don't."

R. Sungenis: Notice how Dr. White has shifted the argument in order to get out from the conundrum into which Jerry put him. Instead of proving, from the TEXT, that the man of verse 17 is not a Christian, Dr. White merely gives Jerry another dose of Dr. White's theology, which is: "Christian's build...Lost folks don't." But that is not what Jerry asked him. Jerry asked him to show from the TEXT that the man of verse 17 is not a Christian, especially since, as I noted above, in verses 18-22 Paul immediately goes into another warning against false wisdom and

false allegiances, addressing it to the Corinthian church at large and giving absolutely no indication that he has made any shift in the audience to whom he wishes to speak. Dr. White's categories, then, are simply contrived, and as a result, they have no bearing on the text.

Dialogue continues:

Jerry: "The verses surrounding 17 are speaking of a particular. Why the change in 17?"

NA27: "Next, Christians do not tear down the Church of Jesus Christ."

R. Sungenis: Again, notice how Jerry keeps pressing Dr. White to answer the simple grammar of the passage, yet Dr. White continually avoids it. Rather, Dr. White again appeals to a theology ("Christians do not tear down the Church of Jesus Christ") that apparently Jerry is to accept simply because Dr. White is telling him it is the case. But, as I have pointed out earlier, in order to do so Dr. White must explain why it is, for example, that in 1 Cor 10:1-12 these same Corinthian Christians are warned not to "fall away" as the ancient Israelites fell away.

Dr. White must also explain how the "jealousy and strife" of 1 Cor 3:3, which, because it causes division in the Corinthian Church and turns men into "babes in Christ" (and would be akin to a 'tearing down of the Church'), is neither talking about Christians in sin nor the bad "works" of "wood, hay and straw" in 1 Cor 3:12-13.

Dialogue continues:

Jerry: "Before 17 and verse 18."

NA27: "Simple: Paul is saying that anyone who messes with the Church will be toast. Pretty simple.

R. Sungenis: Again, Dr. White hoists himself on the hangman's knot with this retort, since it is also "pretty simple" that, grammatically speaking, "anyone" must refer to both Christian and non-Christian.

Dr. White retorts:

NA27: "There is no logical, nor linguistic, nor textual reason to assume that the "certain person" of v. 15 is in any way related to 'a certain person' in v. 17."

R. Sungenis: Unfortunately for Dr. White's position, it is quite "logical" that they are related. It is obvious from the text that there is a progression downward, starting from the man in verse 14. The man in verse 14 does not have his work burned up, and therefore he receives his reward immediately. The man in verse 15 has work burned up, and therefore he cannot receive a reward immediately, rather, he must "suffer" and must pass through the fire. The man in verse 17 does not build but destroys, and therefore there is neither reward nor a chance for salvation; rather, he is destroyed.

In fact, the "logic" of the passage fits perfectly into Catholic theology, since the man in verse 14 would represent those who go to heaven, verse 15 represents those who go to Purgatorial fires before going to heaven, while verse 17 represents those who go to eternal destruction in Hell.

Second, we have already seen the "linguistic" relatedness between verses 15 and 17, since both use the identical formula "If anyone does X, this will happen as a result." In fact, as I noted earlier, one of the most interesting aspects of 1 Corinthians 3:15 is Paul's use of a specific Greek word. It is the Greek verb *zemiothesetai* (indicative, future, passive) from the verb *zemioo*, used six times in the New Testament. It generally refers to detrimental consequences. The Latin Vulgate translates it as *detrimentum*. Most English translations render it "suffer loss," but this is not a complete understanding of the word. New Testament usage of *zemioo* occurs as: "loss" (Ph 3:8); "damage," "harm" (2Co 7:9); "forfeiture" (Lk 9:25; Mt 16:26; Mk 8:36). The Greek noun *zemia*, used four times in the New Testament, appears as "loss/harm" (Ac 27:10, 21; Ph 3:7-8). For 1Cor 3:15, Greek lexicons, such as Louw-Nida; Walter Bauer; Arndt-Gingrich; et al, render *zemiothesetai*'s first meaning as "punishment."

a) **Louw-Nida Lexicon**: #02949:38.7: *zemioomai*: "to be punished, with the implication of suffering damage - to be punished, to suffer punishment. *zemiothesetai* "but if anyone's work is burned up he will suffer punishment" 1 Cor 3:15. It is also possible to understand *zemioomai* in 1 Cor 3:15 as meaning simply 'to suffer loss.'"

Notice that Louw-Nida's first, or primary, definition of *zemioomai* in 1 Cor 3:15 is "suffer punishment."

b) **Walter Bauer' Lexicon** states: "*zemioo*...2. be punished (Lysias 31, 26 al.; Dit., Or. 669, 40; Ptebt. 5, 92; Pro 19:9; Jos., Ant. 15, 16) 1 Cor 3:15. – Astumpff, TW II 890-4. M-M." (page 338).

Notice that Bauer places 1 Cor 3:15 as the example of where *zemioo* has the meaning of "be punished."

c) **The UBS Greek Dictionary** states: "*zemioo*, passive, lose, forfeit, suffer loss; be punished (1 Cor 3:15)"

Notice how the UBS puts a semicolon after suffer loss, thus considering the meaning of "be punished" the primary meaning of 1 Cor. 3:15.

d) **Liddell and Scott Greek lexicon**, along with the meaning of "suffer loss" and "to fine," states: "2. generally, to punish, Id., Thuc."

These lexicons concur with LXX usage of "penalty, punishment" in legal and non-legal contexts, in the six uses of the Greek verb *zemioo*: Ex 21:22; Dt 22:19; Pr 17:26; 19:19; 21:11; 22:3; and seven uses of the Greek noun *zemia*: 2Kg 23:33; Er 7:26; Pr 22:3; 27:12; 1Ed 1:36; 8:24; 2Mc 4:48. Of these, Ex 21:22 and Pr 19:19 have identical morphology as *zemiothesetai* of 1 Cor 3:15 (indicative, future, passive, 3rd, person, singular) and are translated "punished" (from the Hebrew *anash*, which means "fine," "punish," or "penalty").

Hence "punishment" is one of the primary lexical meanings of the Greek verb *zemiothesetai*, and it is the primary meaning in 1 Cor 3:15. Moreover, in context, "punishment" is also the grammatical meaning, since 1 Cor 3:17 demands that God's punishment of corrupt temple workers has the builder of verse 15 as one of its targets, albeit for him the punishment is less than total destruction. A complete destruction would be denoted by a Greek verb such as *kolasin* (Mt 25:46; 2Pt 2:9; 1Jn 4:18).

Finally, the man of verse 15 and the man of verse 17 are related "textually" since it is obvious by any fair-minded reading of the text, beginning at verse 1 through verse 23, that there is no break; no shift in audience; no indicators that Paul has two different classes involved, Christian and non-Christian. There is no evidence in the rest of the Corinthian epistles that Paul makes such a distinction. In fact, Paul specifically warns the Corinthians that they can, indeed, fall (1 Cor 10:12; 2 Cor 13:5, et al) and that the bad works (i.e., false allegiances and false wisdom) that they are bringing into the Church is indeed sin and they will be punished for it, either temporally or eternally.

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