

1 Corinthians 3:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

Analysis

If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (οὕτως δὲ ὡς διὰ πυρός, houtōs de hōs dia pyros)—Paul envisions a believer whose work is entirely consumed yet who personally survives. Zēmiōthēsetai (ζημιωθήσεται, 'shall suffer loss') describes forfeited reward, not lost salvation. The emphatic autos de (αὐτὸς δὲ, 'but he himself') contrasts person and work: the work burns; the person is saved.

The phrase hōs dia pyros ('as through fire') is notoriously difficult. It doesn't mean purgatorial suffering but escaping catastrophe—like fleeing a burning building with only one's life. Amos 4:11 uses similar imagery: 'as a firebrand plucked out of the burning.' This verse refutes both universalism (not all are saved, only those built on Christ-foundation) and works-salvation (even failed service doesn't forfeit salvation resting on Christ). It pastorally warns that lazy or worldly ministry brings eschatological regret—loss of reward, not loss of soul—while maintaining the security of those truly founded on Christ.

Historical Context

House fires in ancient cities were devastating and common. Residents might escape with nothing but their lives—no possessions, no rewards of labor, just survival. Paul's audience would viscerally understand this image: being saved 'through fire' meant losing everything but life itself. This earthly tragedy pictures eschatological loss of reward while maintaining salvation.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does this verse comfort you about salvation's security while still warning against wasted service?
2. What ministry or life investment might prove to be 'burned'—leaving you saved but suffering loss of reward?
3. How can you avoid being saved 'as through fire'—with nothing to show for your Christian life except bare salvation?

Interlinear Text

εἶ	τινος	τὸ	ἔργον	κατακαήσεται	ζημιωθήσεται	αὐτὸς
G1487	G5100	G3588	work	shall be burned	he shall suffer loss	he himself
			G2041	G2618	G2210	G846
δὲ	σωθήσεται	οὕτως	δὲ	ὥς	διὰ	πυρός
but	shall be saved	so	but	as	by	fire
G1161	G4982	G3779	G1161	G5613	G1223	G4442

Additional Cross-References

2 John 1:8 (Parallel theme): Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

Jude 1:23 (Salvation): And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Revelation 3:18 (Parallel theme): I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

1 Peter 4:18 (Salvation): And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org