

Tradition and Rhetoric in Paul's Correspondence with the Corinthians

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Edited by

Harm W. Hollander

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PREFACE

This volume brings together a number of essays that have been published before, and which deal with topics and passages in the apostle Paul's letters to the Corinthians. Apart from two essays written with two of his students, all were written by the editor himself between 1991 and 2012 (and published between 1993 and 2013) when he was a lecturer at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Leiden (The Netherlands). The essays have been slightly revised for this volume; additions (in the footnotes) are denoted by square brackets.

The primary aim of all the essays is to elucidate Paul's ways of defending himself against the attacks of some Corinthian Christians and his attempts to persuade all his readers in Corinth to keep on living according to the law of God. In order to achieve this goal, it is first necessary to realise that Paul was an active member of the Graeco-Roman, Hellenistic society of the time and, more precisely, belonged to a Jewish-Hellenistic milieu. That means that he was thoroughly acquainted with all kinds of Hellenistic concepts, motifs and traditions. My view is, therefore, that any interpreter of Paul's letters must first look for those concepts, motifs and traditions that Paul shared with many of his contemporaries by means of careful analysis of a number of the particular and important terms and words used by the apostle.

But that is certainly not all. Having made such an analysis, the interpreter should examine the specific ways in which Paul uses these concepts, motifs and traditions to convince those he is addressing of his standpoint, position or point of view. Paul certainly demonstrates some rhetorical skills; something which

is in fact nothing more than “the art of speaking or writing so as to persuade people effectively” (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*). We do not know, of course, whether the apostle was always successful in persuading his addressees; in the case of the Corinthian Christians this may be doubted. In any case, the interpreter should investigate all the rhetorical devices employed by the apostle to convince by means of a careful discourse analysis of the thread and progress of his argument.

The essays in this volume hopefully represent a successful attempt to combine both methods of exegesis; to trace the views and ideas the apostle Paul shared with his contemporaries as well as to discover the manner in which he used and adapted them in order to persuade his addressees effectively, but without the liberal sprinkling of difficult and preferably Latin terms usually found in the rhetorical analyses of Paul’s letters, which seem mainly to be intended to impress.

The essays collected in this volume were originally written for the following publications:

-chapter 1: *New Testament Studies* 40 (1994): 89-104

-chapter 2: *New Testament Studies* 55 (2009): 456-70

-chapter 3: *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32 (2010): 395-403

-chapter 4: *The Expository Times* 124 (2013): 166-73

-chapter 5: *Novum Testamentum* 38 (1996): 224-36

-chapter 6: *Novum Testamentum* 35 (1993): 270-91

-chapter 7: *Novum Testamentum* 40 (1998): 117-35

-chapter 8: *The Scriptures of Israel in Jewish and Christian Tradition. Essays in Honour of Maarten J.J. Menken*, edited by Bart J. Koet, Steve Moyise, and Joseph Verheyden, 179-91. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013

-chapter 9: *The Book of Ezekiel and its Influence*, edited by Henk Jan de Jonge and Johannes Tromp, 103-21. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007

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I feel privileged to have collaborated with two of my students during my time at the Faculty of Theology at Leiden; first, with Joost Holleman, PhD student at the time and now a managing partner for a venture capital and growth equity firm in Amsterdam (see ch. 6), and second, with Gijsbert E. van der Hout, MA student at the time and now a minister of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN) (see ch. 5). I thank both for their indispensable help.

Thanks are also due to Cambridge Scholars Publishing and their Commissioning Editor Adam Rummens for their willingness to publish this volume and for their help with the preparation of the manuscript.

Finally, I wish to dedicate this book to the late Professor Dr Marinus de Jonge and to Professor Dr Klaus Berger, both of whom were my teachers during my studies at the Faculty of Theology in Leiden in the 1970s. They introduced me to the wonderful world of New Testament exegesis, and taught me the methods for interpreting ancient texts.

The Editor

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>EWNT</i>	Balz, H., and G. Schneider (eds.), <i>Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> . 3 vols. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1980-1983
LCL	Loeb Classical Library. London: Heinemann
LXX	Septuagint
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OT	Old Testament
<i>OTP</i>	Charlesworth, J. H. (ed.), <i>The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . 2 vols. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983-1985
NT	New Testament
PG	Migne, J.-P., <i>Patrologia Graeca</i> . 162 vols. Paris: J.-P. Migne's Imprimerie Catholique, 1857-1866
REB	Revised English Bible
<i>ThWNT</i>	Kittel, G., and G. Friedrich (eds.), <i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> . 10 vols. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1933-1979

CHAPTER ONE

THE TESTING BY FIRE
OF THE BUILDERS' WORKS:
1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-15

HARM W. HOLLANDER

One of the most interesting passages to deal with the apostle Paul's thoughts on the Last Day and the final Judgment is found in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. Far from being an excursus, a digression or an insertion, having almost nothing to do with its context,¹ the verses are an important element in Paul's arguments on the diversity in the Christian community in Corinth in chapters 1-4. It runs partly parallel with verses 5-9, illustrating the same point along more or less similar lines: people responsible for the growth of the Christian communities are just servants of God and will be recompensed according to their labours at the end of time.

Though the general function of the passage seems to be clear, the details are not. In particular, the judgment imagery seems to be "somewhat inconsistent,"² due to Paul's supposed use of several fire motifs in verses 13-15.³ Related to these questions

¹ So, e.g., Bultmann, *Predigt*, 98; Branick, "1 Corinthians 1-3," 262-63.

² Kuck, *Judgment*, 185.

³ According to Weiss, for instance, there are "hier also eigentlich 3 Bilder in einander geflochten" (*Korintherbrief*, 82); Lang speaks of

there is the issue of origin. Do we find here traditional *topoi* introduced by Paul for the sake of argument⁴ or rather is the description of final divine judgment “unique in its emphasis on the disclosure and testing of individual works”?⁵

Through a detailed analysis of the passage with the help of *Traditionsgeschichte* and *Religionsgeschichte* I will try to give some new answers to these questions.

Parties and heroes: 1 Corinthians 1-4

In 1 Corinthians 1-4 the apostle Paul responds to reports from the people of Chloe about a totally divided Christian community in Corinth. There were several groups or parties, one claiming to belong to Paul, another to Apollos, another to Cephas (Peter), and—presumably—another to Jesus Christ (1:11-12).⁶ It seems likely that Christians in Corinth put their faith in “heroes,” men who were thought to play an indispensable part in their salvation. And if there was a Christ party, its members did not confess Jesus Christ as the unique Saviour of all mankind, but only as their private saviour. The Christians in Corinth admired Paul, Peter, Apollos (and Christ), while the

“vier geläufige Vorstellungen” brought together by the apostle “in lose Verbindung,” viz., “1. das Motiv vom brennenden Haus ..., 2. die Erwartung, dass der kommende Herr mit Feuer erscheint ..., 3. die Vorstellung der eschatologischen Feuerprobe ... und 4. die sprichwörtliche Redewendung vom Gerettetwerden durchs Feuer” (*ThWNT* 6.944); and Radl even distinguishes “mindestens vier Feuer-Motiven” (*Ankunft*, 105).

⁴ So, e.g., Radl, *Ankunft*, 101.

⁵ Kuck, *Judgment*, 181.

⁶ On these parties, see esp. Barrett, “Cephas and Corinth”; Fitch, “Paul, Apollos, Cephas, Christ”; Vielhauer, “Kephaspartei”; Sellin, “Weisheit”; Baumann, *Mitte und Norm*, 49-55.

adherents of each group regarded themselves as superior to all the others.

As was to be expected, the apostle rebukes the addressees for being so divided. He even calls them “infants in Christ” and people who are still “(all too) human.” Slogans like “I belong to Paul” or “I follow Apollos” do not go well with a Christian way of life (3:1-4).

**Missionaries will be recompensed at the end of time:
1 Corinthians 3**

In the third chapter Paul argues that he himself, Apollos and Cephas are “nothing” and that adhering to them is not a cause for pride (3:5, 7, 21-22). He refers to the example of two of them, himself and Apollos; Apollos, according to Acts 18:24-19:1, had worked as a missionary among the people of Corinth after Paul had left the city. Men who proclaim the Gospel all over the world are in Paul’s opinion simply God’s agents. They do their jobs according to the tasks which God has allotted to each of them. So Paul was charged with the foundation of the Christian community in Corinth whereas Apollos was responsible for the building up of the local church.

In 3:6-9 Paul first compares the Christian community with a garden, a field. The Christians in Corinth are God’s field. Paul is the one who planted and Apollos the one who watered. Both worked closely together but—and this is essential in Paul’s view—it is God who gives the growth. Without God’s activity there would not have been any Christians in Corinth. Paul and Apollos have been appointed to be his servants, his assistants, in his plan of salvation. They had to answer his call, and they had to perform their tasks well. For, as the apostle continues, each of them, that is Paul himself and Apollos and of course

everyone engaged in missionary activities, “will receive his wages according to his labour” (v. 8).

Paul introduces in verse 8 a formula that is frequently found in Jewish and early-Christian literature in the context of God’s judgment of the righteous and sinners on the Last Day. The idea is found for example in Pseudo-Philo, *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* 3:10, “But when the years appointed for the world have been fulfilled ... I will bring the dead to life ... so that I may render to each according to his works and according to the fruits of his own devices” (Harrington, *OTP*), and in Revelation 22:12, “See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work” (ὁ μισθός μου μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἀποδοῦναι ἐκάστῳ ὡς τὸ ἔργον ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ)” (NRSV).⁷

Everybody will be recompensed by God at the end of time according to the things he has done. In 1 Corinthians 3:8 Paul applies this principle to God’s judgment of his agents. They will be judged by what each of them has done for the growth of

⁷ See also *1 En.* 100:7, *2 En.* 44:5, *Ques. Ezra* B 14, *Matt* 16:27, *Rom* 2:6, *2 Cor* 11:15, *2 Tim* 4:14, *1 Pet* 1:17, *Rev* 2:23, 20:12-13, *1 Clem.* 34:3, *2 Clem.* 17:4, etc. The thought that everybody is rewarded according to his works is already found in the OT/LXX (see *Ps* 62:12 [61:13 LXX], *Prov* 24:12, *Isa* 40:10, 62:11, *Jer* 17:10, and *Sir* 16:12-14), but its application to God’s final judgment in the *eschaton* is a later development. See Heiligenthal, *Werke*, 143-64, 171-82, 234-64.

Christianity.⁸ The apostle does not go into the subject of the kinds of rewards to be received by the missionaries.⁹

In 3:10-15 Paul uses another metaphor to make the same point. It is prepared for in the last words of verse 9, "you are God's building." The planting image of the previous section is left behind in favour of a new image. Now the church in Corinth is compared with a building,¹⁰ and Paul himself laid as it were its foundation when, during his stay in Corinth, he founded a small Christian community. He did so "according to the grace of God given to him"¹¹ and he did it well, "as a skilled master builder" (v. 10),¹² for the foundation he laid was Jesus Christ (v. 11).¹³

⁸ Cf. Radl, *Ankunft*, 99-100. There is no difference of meaning between κόπος and ἔργον which is more usual in this context (see also v. 13). Κόπος and ἔργον are found together in, e.g., 1 Thess 1:3, 3:5, Rev 2:2 and 14:13. Cf. in particular Wis 10:17, ἀπέδωκεν ὁσίοις μισθὸν κόπων αὐτῶν. Cf. also Heiligenthal, *Werke*, 210 n. 176. See also n. 26 below.

⁹ By using the word ἴδιος in v. 8b twice, Paul wants to underline once more that God is absolutely impartial and righteous, carefully weighing as it were one's deeds and will recompense each individual missionary according to his individual achievements within the context of his specific task. He does not speak here about a general reward for all those who are called to the service of the Lord. Cf. Mattern, *Verständnis*, 170; Heiligenthal, *Werke*, 209-10.

¹⁰ The association of the two images is common: see, e.g., Jer 1:10 (Jeremiah's call), 18:9, 24:6, Sir 49:7, Philo, *Leg.* 1.48, *Odes Sol.* 38:16-22. See also Vielhauer, *Oikodome*, 7-8, 37-38, 40-42, 74 n. 4.

¹¹ Cf. 15:10, Rom 1:5, 12:3, 15:15, Gal 2:9, and Eph 3:7-8. Paul refers here to his apostolic commission. Or, in the words of Ollrog, *Mitarbeiter*, 176, "Fundamentsetzer ist er als Apostel. Ebenso gilt aber zugleich das Umgekehrte: Als Apostel ist er Fundamentsetzer."

¹² Cf. Isa 3:3, and also Plutarch, *Alex.* 26 (*Vit. par.* 679F).

¹³ That is, "the word of the cross" (1:18), the knowledge of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (2:2). Cf. also Maly, *Gemeinde*, 167-69.

Other missionaries have been called “to build upon it”:¹⁴ they were responsible for the deepening of the Christians’ faith and for the growth of the small Christian community. From the terminology (ἄλλος and ἕκαστος in v. 10) it is clear that Paul, again, does not only have Apollos in mind but all those who were involved in the building up of the Christian church in Corinth, in short all the “heroes.”¹⁵ But this time he excludes himself. Verses 12-15 deal exclusively with the builders or, in the words of the apostle in the previous section, with those who watered, not with the one who planted.

Imperishable and perishable building materials/excellent and less qualified missionaries

In 3:12-15 Paul works out the statement he made at the end of verse 10, viz. that every builder “must take care”¹⁶ how he builds upon” the foundation laid by the apostle. All depends, in Paul’s view, on the materials used by the builders. He mentions six of

¹⁴ For the same imagery, see also Rom 15:20 and Eph 2:20. Its background is (Jewish) Hellenistic: see, e.g., Epictetus, *Diss.* 2.15.8, Philo, *Cher.* 101, *Conf.* 5, 87, *Gig.* 30, *Mut.* 211, *Her.* 116, *Somn.* 2.8, and *Contempl.* 34. On the use of ἐποικοδομεῖν, see Vielhauer, *Oikodome*, 75-81; Kitzberger, *Bau*, 64-72, and Kuck, *Judgment*, 173-74.

¹⁵ It is doubtful if we should see in 3:10-15 “a reference to the work of all believers” (Kuck, *Judgment*, 174; see also Kitzberger, *Bau*, 66 and 70). It is true that in 1 Corinthians there are references to the individual responsibility for the upbuilding of the Christian community (see, e.g., 12:7, 14:3-5, 12, 26). But in view of the direct context, esp. 3:4-5 and 3:21-22, it is more plausible that Paul is referring to those people who were appointed to be missionaries and teachers.

¹⁶ For the parenetic function of the imperative of βλέπω in the context of judgment, see also Mark 4:24, 13:9, 1 Cor 10:12, etc. See also Heiligenthal, *Werke*, 211 n. 179.

them: “gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw” (v. 12). It is certainly not a scale of descending value,¹⁷ for in that case Paul would have mentioned stone or clay as well.¹⁸ His concern is not with the individual value or scarceness of the materials. Rather, he classifies the materials used by the church-builders in two groups: some materials endure fire and are imperishable, while others are consumed by fire and are perishable. Gold, silver and precious stones belong to the first group, wood, hay and straw to the second. It does not seem wise to ask whether Paul meant something in particular by gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay and straw. Nor is it appropriate to ask whether all these materials were really in use as building materials at that time, or whether Paul had some fabulous building in mind or was perhaps thinking of Solomon’s temple with its gold, silver and precious stones.¹⁹ All that seems

¹⁷ As is the case in, e.g., 4 Ezra 7:52-61.

¹⁸ So rightly Lietzmann and Kümmel, *Korinther*, 16; cf. also Schrage, *Korinther (1 Kor 1,1-6,11)*, 299.

¹⁹ So, with reference to 1 Chron 22:14-16, 29:2, 2 Chron 3:6, e.g., Gärtner, *Temple*, 56-60; Maly, *Gemeinde*, 68; Fee, *Corinthians*, 140-41. Cf. Ollrog, *Mitarbeiter*, 170 n. 40; Kuck, *Judgment*, 177. The fact that the Christian community is called “the temple of God” in vv. 16-17 cannot be used as an argument in favour of the assumption that the apostle had Solomon’s temple in mind when he wrote vv. 10-12. Perhaps rather the reverse: the thought of the community as a building may have led to the introduction of the temple imagery in vv. 16-17 (cf. 2 Cor 6:16 and Eph 2:21). Neither is it plausible that Paul has developed the theme while thinking of the Feast of Tabernacles and the building of *sukkoth* in vv. 10-12 (as Massyngherde Ford, “God’s ‘Sukkah,’ ” 139-42, suggests) or some kind of apocalyptic building (cf. Vielhauer, *Oikodome*, 75 n. 5, and Schrage, *Korinther (1 Kor 1,1-6,11)*, 300).

completely irrelevant here.²⁰ The apostle just wants to stress that there are excellent builders, who stimulate the Christian community and work hard for the promotion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (those who use the best materials: gold, silver and precious stones) and that there are less qualified, less stimulating people (those who use inferior materials: wood, hay and straw).

As to the first cluster of materials, it was a matter of common knowledge that gold and silver are imperishable materials which are not consumed by fire but are instead refined.²¹ This process of refining, which is in Greek usually expressed by the verbs *πυρῶν*, *δοκιμάζειν* or *καθαρίζειν*, is referred to in numerous OT and NT passages as well as in other Jewish and Christian sources, often in the form of a simile or metaphor (Prov 10:20, “The tongue of the righteous is choice silver [LXX, ἄργυρος πεπυρωμένος]” [NRSV], Sir 2:5, “For gold is proved in the fire [ἐν πυρὶ δοκιμάζεται χρυσός],” and Philo, *Sacr.* 80, “let the fresh ripeness of the soul be ‘roasted’, that is tested by the might of reason, as gold is tested by the furnace. The sign that it has been tested and approved is its solidity [ὥς πυρὶ χρυσός ... δεδοκιμάσθαι]” [Colson and Whitaker, LCL]).²²

²⁰ See also Weiss, *Korintherbrief*, 80; Robertson and Plummer, *Corinthians*, 62; Ollrog, *Mitarbeiter*, 170; Schrage, *Korinther (1 Kor 1,1-6,11)*, 299-300.

²¹ It will not do to make a sharp distinction between a fire that “refines” (in the case of gold and silver) and one that “burns” (in the case of wood, hay and straw), as, e.g., Vielhauer, *Oikodome*, 77-78 does. Paul just wants to underline that gold and silver are not consumed by fire, but “remain” in one way or another, over against wood, hay and straw. Cf. Herm. *Vis.* 4.3.4, and see n. 33 below.

²² See further, e.g., Num 31:22-23, Job 22:25, Ps 12:6 (11:7 LXX), 66:10 (65:10 LXX), Ezek 22:18-22, Zech 13:9, Mal 3:2-3, Wis 3:4-

By mentioning these two precious metals Paul certainly has this topic in mind. That he adds a third element, that of precious stones, which of course is somewhat different from gold and silver in its reaction to fire, is due to the fact that the three form a regular cluster²³ (2 Chron 32:27, Prov 8:10-11, 19 LXX, Dan 11:38 Th, Rev 18:12, and *Apoc. Ps.-Meth.* 11:14). Obviously, Paul took up this triplet with an eye to their imperishableness which was traditionally connected with two of them (gold and silver).

The last three materials mentioned by the apostle in verse 12, wood, hay and straw, also belong closely together. They were known as materials that are easily consumed by fire. See, for instance, Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 20.65.1, “for, since the huts were made of reeds and straw (ἐκ καλάμου καὶ χόρτου) and the fire (τοῦ πυρός) was forcibly fanned by the breeze, the aid brought by the soldiers came too late” (Geer, LCL).²⁴ The weakness or perishableness of the three materials comes to the fore particularly when used in metaphors and similes, as found in OT and NT texts and in related literature; see, for instance, Exodus 15:7, “you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble (LXX, ὡς καλάμην)” (NRSV), and Zechariah 12:6, “I will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot on a pile of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves (LXX, ὡς δαλὸν πυρὸς ἐν ξύλοις καὶ ὡς λαμπάδα πυρὸς ἐν

6, Philo, *Decal.* 48, 1 Pet 1:7, 4:12, Rev 3:18, *Did.* 16:5, Herm. *Vis.* 4.3.4, and *Mart. Pol.* 15:2.

²³ Λίθους τιμίους certainly do not refer to some kind of costly building stones like marble (so, e.g., Deissmann, *Paulus*, 243-47; Jeremias, *ThWNT* 4.272 n. 5). See also above.

²⁴ See further, e.g., Aristotle, *Mete.* 341b 27 (καλάμη), Plutarch, *Suav. viv.* 14 (*Mor.* 1096C) (χόρτον ἢ καλάμην), Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl.* 3.29.2 (πυροῦσι τὸν ... χόρτον), 5.21.5 (καλάμων ἢ ξύλων), 16.41.5 (χόρτον ἐνέπρησαν), and Josephus *B.J.* 6.153 (ξύλειαν ἢ χόρτου συλλογὴν).

καλάμη); and they shall devour” (NRSV).²⁵ It is surely this traditional image that led Paul to introduce these three materials over against gold, silver and precious stones.

The builders, therefore, must take care how they build, because there are excellent as well as inferior materials and the choice of material has direct consequences for the building itself, the church. Paul then turns in verses 13-15 to the theme of God’s judgment. He has already pointed out before that everyone will be recompensed by God according to the things he has done (v. 8). So each builder’s work,²⁶ that is whether he has built with excellent or with inferior materials, “will become manifest (φανερὸν γενήσεται), for the Day will disclose it (ἡ γὰρ ἡμέρα δηλώσει)” (v. 13).

The terminology is traditional. “The Day”²⁷ refers, of course, to the Last Day, the Day of the Lord, the Day of Judgment, expressions that have their roots in the OT.²⁸ The term was taken over by Jewish and Christian writers to denote the end of time when God would judge all mankind. And it was believed that on that day everybody’s deeds, even secret deeds and thoughts, would become manifest and would be examined and judged; see, for instance, *4 Ezra* 7:35, “And recompense shall follow, and the reward shall be manifested; righteous deeds

²⁵ See also, e.g., Job 41:19-21, Isa 5:24, Joel 2:5, Obad 18, Mal 4:1 (3:19 LXX), Wis 3:7, and *6 Ezra* 1:23, *1 En.* 48:9, *Apoc. El.* 1:4, 5:23, and cf. finally Matt 6:30.

²⁶ Here, the word ἔργον is used as the result of one’s mission. There does not seem to be any difference of meaning with κόπος, which Paul uses in v. 8 (against Kitzberger, *Bau*, 70-71). Cf. Pesch, “Sonderlohn,” 200 n. 5; Ollrog, *Mitarbeiter*, 171; Kuck, *Judgment*, 174 n. 123; and see also n. 8 above.

²⁷ Cf. 1 Thess 5:4, Heb 10:25, *Barn.* 7:9, 21:3, etc.

²⁸ See, e.g., Isa 10:20, 13:6, 9, Amos 9:11, Zeph 1:15, 18, 2:3, Zech 12:3-4, and Mal 4:1-6 (3:19-24 LXX).

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

shall awake, and unrighteous deeds shall not sleep” (Metzger, *OTP*), 1 *Enoch* 45:3, 100:10, 2 *Enoch* 44:5, and especially 2 *Baruch* 83:2-3, “And he will surely judge those who are in his world, and will truly inquire into everything with regard to all their works ... He will certainly investigate the secret thoughts ... And he will make them manifest” (Klijn, *OTP*), 2 Corinthians 5:10, 2 *Clement* 16:3, “But you know that the day of judgment is already approaching ... and then shall be made manifest the secret and open deeds of men (τότε φανήσεται τὰ κρύφια καὶ φανερά ἔργα τῶν ἀνθρώπων)” (Lake, *Apostolic Fathers*), and Shepherd of Hermas, *Similitude* 4.3, “the fruit of the righteous will be plain (τῶν δικαίων οἱ καρποὶ φανεροὶ ἔσονται)” (Lake, *Apostolic Fathers*).

This general idea of the Last Judgment, when all people will be judged by God according to their deeds, is applied by Paul to those who are called to build the church (in Corinth) on the foundation of Jesus Christ as laid by the apostle himself. On the Last Day their deeds done openly or secretly will be brought to light, will be disclosed,²⁹ and they will be judged by God according to what each of them has done for the building up of the Christian community.

In other words: all builders, all authorities in the Christian community, are servants of God, whose works cannot be approved or disapproved by the members of the church. The Christians in Corinth are not in a position to judge apostles and missionaries. It is God who, at the Final Judgment, will disclose

²⁹ Δηλοῦν means in this context the disclosure of secrets, of things hidden so far (in this case: of the deeds of the church-builders). Cf. Ps 51:6 (50:8 LXX), τὰ ἄδηλα καὶ τὰ κρύφια τῆς σοφίας σου ἐδήλωσάς μοι. See also Bultmann, *ThWNT* 2.61; Schrage, *Korinther* (1 Kor 1,1-6,11), 301; Kuck, *Judgment*, 179.

their work and will administer justice to each of them individually.³⁰

Fire as a means of testing at the end of time

How it will be noticed which one worked with superior building materials and who with inferior materials, is indicated by Paul in the second part of verse 13: *fire* reveals one's work,³¹ *fire* will test³² what sort of work each one has done. And this statement is elaborated in verses 14-15. First, positively: "If the

³⁰ Cf. Heiligenthal, *Werke*, 210, 214.

³¹ Most commentators are of the opinion that "the Day" (ἡ ἡμέρα) is the intended subject of ἀποκαλύπτεται; so, e.g., Weiss, *Korintherbrief*, 81; Robertson and Plummer, *Corinthians*, 63; Lietzmann and Kümmel, *Korinther*, 16; Conzelmann, *Korinther*, 96 n. 18; Fee, *Corinthians*, 142; Radl, *Ankunft*, 103; Kuck, *Judgment*, 179. They refer to passages like Dan 7:9, Joel 2:3, 30, Mal 4:1, and 2 Thess 1:7, where this Day is associated with fire. But nowhere it is said that the Last Day "will be revealed." The passive of the verb ἀποκαλύπτειν does not seem to go with "the Day" (ἡ ἡμέρα) in Greek. Consequently, it is more likely that τὸ ἔργον is the intended subject; so, e.g., Bachmann, *Korinther*, 164; St John Parry, *Corinthians*, 66 (but see 67!); Vielhauer, *Oikodome*, 77. First, because it fits the context where "the disclosure of each one's works" is mentioned; second, because it goes well with the item that even secret deeds and thoughts will become manifest on the Day of Judgment (see above; for ἀποκαλύπτειν associated with "secrets," cf. Sir 1:30, ἀποκαλύψει κύριος τὰ κρυπτά σου, and Luke 12:2); thirdly, because ἀποκαλύπτειν does go with ἔργον (see, e.g., Sir 11:27, ἐν συντελείᾳ ἀνθρώπου ἀποκάλυψις ἔργων αὐτοῦ); and finally, since redundancy is not foreign to Paul's style (see, e.g., Rom 7:14-25 and Gal 2:16), a supposed tautology in v. 13, an argument often put forward by the advocates of "the Day" as subject, is certainly not a decisive point against ἔργον as subject. Quite the contrary!

³² For δοκιμάζειν in this context, see above (and n. 22).

work which any man has built survives,³³ he will receive a reward.”³⁴ Next, negatively: “If any man’s work is burned up, he will be fined,³⁵ but he himself will be saved,³⁶ but only as through fire.”

³³ That is, “remains as it was,” “stands,” over against “is burned up” in v. 15. Cf. Herm. *Vis.* 4.3.4, “The golden part is you, who have fled from this world, for even as gold is tried in the fire and becomes valuable, so also you who live among them, are being tried. Those then who remain (μείναντες) and pass through the flames shall be purified by them” (Lake, *Apostolic Fathers*), and *Did.* 16:5.

³⁴ Μισθὸν λήμψεται (cf. v. 8), which is here, of course, meant in a strictly positive sense: the church-builder, whose work survives, will be rewarded. The nature of the reward(s), which is obviously not eternal salvation as such, is not made explicit, but it seems clear that Paul anticipates some special joy for faithful missionaries. Cf. also Pesch, *Sonderlohn*, and Kuck, *Judgment*, 182.

³⁵ Ζημιωθήσεται, which means either “he will suffer loss,” that is, he will lose the reward, whatever that will be, or “he will be fined,” he will pay the penalty. Both interpretations have their pros and cons, but the latter is, in my opinion, to be preferred, as it is more suitable to the immediate context. For this rendering is the exact opposite of μισθὸν λήμψεται, “will be rewarded.” Besides, “will be fined,” which of course does not refer to a loss of salvation, but nevertheless sounds quite threatening, fits in very well with the following “but he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.” And finally, the statement “is in complete harmony with the payment policy found in many of the secular contracts relating to temple construction,” as Shanor pointed out in the article “Master Builder,” 470. That Paul did not elaborate upon the nature of the fine(s) is not strange: neither did he in the case of the nature of the reward(s). For a discussion on the meaning of ζημιῶν, see also Ollrog, *Mitarbeiter*, 172 n. 53; Kuck, *Judgment*, 182-83; Schrage, *Korinther (1 Kor 1,1-6,11)*, 303.

³⁶ Σωθήσεται. Since Paul is referring to God’s judgment on the Last Day, the verb must be understood soteriologically. Paul speaks of the final salvation and not just of a narrow escape.

One of the most striking elements in the passage is the role of fire. Traditionally, fire is an agent of God's judgment on the Last Day, destroying all those who have turned against God.³⁷ In 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, however, fire is not depicted as the agent of God's punitive wrath, but as a means of *testing* the quality of the builders' works.³⁸ What "remains" is good; what "is burned up" not. And consequently, some builders will be rewarded and others fined.

A well-known parallel: Testament of Abraham 13

As a parallel to this particular idea, *Testament of Abraham* 13 (Rec. A) has been mentioned.³⁹ In this passage, the archangel Michael explains to Abraham, during his heavenly journey, a judgment scene which the patriarch has just witnessed. It is not the final judgment by God that is described here, but the judgment of men immediately after death. The judge turns out to be Abel, the brother of Cain. Two angels, one on the right and one on the left, record sins and righteous deeds. Another angel, called Dokiël, holds a balance in his hand and weighs

³⁷ Cf., e.g., Isa 66:15-16, *Jub.* 9:15, *Sib. Or.* 3:72-74, Matt 3:10. See further esp. Kuck, *Judgment*, 180 n. 155.

³⁸ Since v. 13c does not speak of fire as an instrument of God's punishing judgment, there is not a shift from theophany in v. 13c to testing in vv. 13d-15a (see also above and n. 31). Neither does Paul speak of the purging fire of purgatory or the fire of hell, which were opinions advocated by a number of early-Christian and mediaeval church Fathers and theologians; cf. Gnlika, *Fegfeuer*; Kuck, *Judgment*, 180-81 nn. 157-58.

³⁹ See esp. Fishburne, "1 Corinthians III. 10-15." He was not the first to mention this parallel in connection with 1 Cor 3. In n. 2 on p. 109 he refers to Héring who brought up the *T. Ab.* passage in his *Corinthians*. Earlier, however, Weiss did the same in his *Korintherbrief*.

the righteous deeds and sins of each soul. A fourth angel, Purouel, holds the fire in his hand,

and he tests the work of men through fire (δοκιμάζει τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἔργα διὰ πυρός). And if the fire burns up the work of anyone (καὶ εἴ τινος τὸ ἔργον κατακαύσει τὸ πῦρ), immediately the angel of judgment takes him and carries him away to the place of sinners, a most bitter place of punishment. But if the fire tests the work of anyone and does not touch it (εἴ τινος δὲ τὸ ἔργον τὸ πῦρ δοκιμάσει καὶ μὴ ἄψεται αὐτοῦ), this person is justified and the angel of righteousness takes him and carries him up to be saved (εἰς τὸ σῶζεσθαι) in the lot of the righteous. And thus, most righteous Abraham, all things in all people are tested by fire and balance (ἐν πυρὶ καὶ ζυγῷ δοκιμάζονται). (vv. 11-14; Sanders, *OTP*)

The similarities between both passages are indeed striking. In both texts it is told how *works* are *tested* by *fire* on a *day of judgment*, and also the language is quite similar. But it does not necessarily imply a dependence of one text upon the other.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Fishburne thinks it does and he tries to prove Paul's dependence on *T. Ab.* His argumentation, however, is far from convincing, apart from the fact that it is quite unlikely "that *T. Abraham* was written and circulated early enough to have been known by Paul" (Kuck, *Judgment*, 91). One example may suffice here. On p. 112 he assumes that in 1 Cor 2:9 Paul "is quoting rather freely from the Isaianic passages mentioned (i.e. Isa 64.4 and 65.17)." As to the words τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν, which are not found in the Isaianic passages (τοῖς ὑπομένουσιν αὐτόν), he believes that Paul was dependent on *T. Ab.* 3:3, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, who is summoning him (Abraham) to those who love him (τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν)." It is, however, far more probable that Paul did not quote freely from Isaiah, but joined an apocalyptic tradition found in a number of Jewish and Christian writings, a more or less fixed unity that could be altered, shortened or amplified according to the literary needs of

The differences between both texts are a serious obstacle to the assumption of such a dependence. In *Testament of Abraham* 13, for instance, there is a judgment of men, righteous and sinners, by Abel immediately after death, whereas Paul speaks about God's judgment of good and unskilled church-builders at the end of time. In the *Testament of Abraham* the fire in the angel's hand is not the only means of testing men's work: it is also weighed in a balance which is held by the second angel. Moreover, the sequence of the words and sentences is in both texts not exactly the same, as is also the case with the terminology. Finally, the reference to perishable and imperishable materials as we find in 1 Corinthians 3:12 is completely absent in *Testament of Abraham* 13.

A more or less fixed tradition

Since the differences between 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 and *Testament of Abraham* 13 are a real obstacle to the assumption of a dependence of one text upon the other, one should take into account the possibility that both authors were familiar with a more or less fixed tradition about fire as a means of testing men or their work in the context of God's judgment of the righteous and sinners.⁴¹

each individual author. Cf. also Berger, "I Kor. II.9." Kuck wants to explain the close verbal resemblances between vv. 13-15 and *T. Ab.* 13:11-13 by "the activity of Christian scribes who reworked the text of the *Testament of Abraham* under the influence of their familiarity with 1 Cor 3" (*Judgment*, 184; cf. 9; and cf. Sanders, *OTP*, 1.889). But such an influence on a scribe of *T. Ab.* remains, though possible, highly speculative.

⁴¹ Radl, *Ankunft*, 101-2, thinks that both texts present the same traditional *topoi*. He is of the opinion that Paul and the unknown author of *T. Ab.* were familiar with an existing scheme ("ein vorgegebenes Schema") that ran something like:

The first stage in the development of this tradition, the general presupposition behind it, may be the motif that fire cannot touch righteous men, since God stands by them. A well-known passage in this context is Daniel 3, where it is told how Daniel's three friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were cast into the burning fiery furnace but remained unhurt: οὐχ ἥψατο αὐτῶν καθόλου τὸ πῦρ ... οὐχ ἥψατο τὸ πῦρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτῶν, καὶ αἱ τρίχες αὐτῶν οὐ κατεκάησαν (3:50, 94 LXX). The men who had cast Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the furnace, however, were caught by the fire and died.⁴²

Similar stories are found in Pseudo-Philo, *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* 6:16-18 and 38:3-4. In the first passage, we read how Abram was thrown by Joktan and his men into a fiery furnace,

But God caused a great earthquake, and the fire gushing out of the furnace leaped forth in flames and sparks of flame. And it burned all those standing around in sight of the furnace. And all those who were burned in that day were

ἐκάστου τὸ ἔργον τὸ πῦρ δοκιμάσει.

εἴ τις τὸ ἔργον μενεῖ, μισθὸν λήμψεται·

εἴ τις τὸ ἔργον κατακαίσεται, ζημιωθήσεται.

But the verbal similarities between both texts do not necessarily point to a common (written) scheme, nor do the two εἴ τις (τινος) phrases, which are regular "Sätze heiligen Rechts" (cf. Käsemann, "Sätze heiligen Rechtes," 248-60; Berger, "Sätzen heiligen Rechts"; Berger, " 'Sätze heiligen Rechts' im N.T. "). Heiligenthal, *Werke*, 260-62, assumes an originally Persian tradition adopted by Paul and the author of *T. Ab*. The assumption is, however, based on no more than one piece of literature, viz., the Oracle of Hystaspes as found in Lactantius, *Inst.* 7:21 (on this text, see below). Unfortunately, Heiligenthal has not examined the tradition behind 1 Cor and *T. Ab*. more thoroughly.

⁴² On this story, see esp. Haag, "Dan 3:1-30," and Kellermann, "Danielbuch," 54-57.

83,500. But there was not the least injury to Abram from the burning of the fire (*non est nec modica facta lesura, in concrematione ignis*).

The second passage tells the story of seven pious men who were not willing to sacrifice to Baal and were taken by the servants of Jair to burn them in the fire,

And when they had put them in the fire, Nathaniel, the angel who was in charge of fire, came forth and extinguished the fire and burned the servants of Jair. But he let the seven men escape (*extinxit ignem, et incendit pueros Iair. Viris autem septem fugam dedit*). (Harrington, *OTP*)

The same motif is also formulated as a more or less general principle: sinners cannot escape God's wrath, neither on earth nor in the underworld, but God will have mercy on the righteous. Even fire will not harm a righteous man: φλὸξ πυρὸς καὶ ὀργὴ ἀδίκων οὐχ ἄψεται αὐτοῦ (*Pss. Sol. 15:4*).⁴³

⁴³ Cf. *Pss. Sol. 13:6*, ὅτι δεινὴ ἡ καταστροφὴ τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ, καὶ οὐχ ἄψεται δικαίου οὐδὲν ἐκ πάντων τούτων. These texts, particularly *Dan 3:50*, 94 LXX, explain the use of ἄπτεσθαι in *T. Ab. 13:13*. Cf. also *Mart. Pol. 15-16*: when Polycarp has been condemned to the stake and the men in charge of the fire start to light it, “those of us to whom it was given to see beheld a miracle ... For the flames, bellying out like a ship's sail in the wind, formed into the shape of a vault and thus surrounded the martyr's body as with a wall. And he was within it not as burning flesh but rather as bread being baked, or like gold and silver being purified in a smelting-furnace ... At last when these vicious men realized that his body could not be consumed by the fire (μὴ δυνάμενον αὐτοῦ τὸ σῶμα ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρὸς δαπανηθῆναι)” (*Musurillo, Martyrs*), *Mart. Pion. 22*, and *Mart. Paese and Thecla*, in *Till, Heiligen- und Martyrerlegenden 1.77-80* (text), 89-90 (trans.). On the influence of *Dan 3* on martyrdom literature, see Kellermann, “Danielbuch,” 51-59.

In a following stage, this general rule was linked up with the motif of God's judgment of men, either immediately after death or on the Last Day. Fire was not only mentioned as a means of punishment but was also introduced as an instrument of testing men: all will have to go "through the fire," the righteous will remain unhurt, sinners will be burned. See, for instance,

And then all will pass through the blazing river and the unquenchable flame (διὰ αἰθομένου ποταμοῦ καὶ φλογὸς ἀσβέστου). All the righteous will be saved (σωθήσονται), but the impious will then be destroyed for all ages. (*Sib. Or.* 2:252-55; Collins, *OTP*)

And he saw fiery gates, and at these gates he saw two lions lying there from whose mouth and nostrils and eyes proceeded the most powerful flames. The most powerful men were entering and passing through the fire, and it did not touch them (*transiebant flammam, et non tangebat eos*). And Ezra said, "Who are they, who advance so safely?" The angels said to him, "They are the just whose reputes has ascended to heaven ..." And others were entering that they might pass through the gates, and dogs were ripping them apart and fire was consuming them (*ignis comburebat*). And Ezra said, "Who are they?" The angels said, "They denied the Lord." (*Vis. Ezra* 3-10; Mueller and Robbins, *OTP*)

Then he brought me to a river of fire ... And that river had wisdom in its fire: It would not harm the righteous, but only the sinners by burning them. (*T. Isaac* 5:21-25; Stinespring, *OTP*)

The same divine fire (*divinus ignis*) ... will both burn the wicked and will form them again, and will replace as much as it shall consume of their bodies, and will supply itself with eternal nourishment ... Thus, without any wasting of bodies, which regain their substance, it will only burn and affect them with a sense of pain. But when He shall have judged the righteous, He will also try them with fire (*sed et iustos*

cum iudicaverit deus, etiam igni eos examinabit). Then they whose sins shall exceed either in weight or in number, shall be scorched by the fire and burnt (*perstringentur igni atque amburentur*); but they whom full justice and maturity of virtue has imbued will not perceive that fire (*ignem illum non sentient*); for they have something of God in themselves which repels and rejects the violence of the flame. So great is the force of innocence, that the flame shrinks from it without doing harm (*refugiat innoxius*); which has received from God this power, that it burns the wicked, and is under the command of the righteous (*impios urat, iustis temperet*). (Lactantius, *Inst.* 7:21; Fletcher, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*)⁴⁴

Conclusion

It seems likely that both the author of the *Testament of Abraham* and Paul were familiar with this more or less fixed tradition about fire as a means of testing men on the Last Day and adapted it independently, each according to his specific literary needs. They introduced it, because the theme of *men* tested by fire and the Jewish-Christian motif of being recompensed by God at the end of time according to one's *deeds* share one fundamental item, viz. the absolute impartiality and objectivity of God's judgment.⁴⁵ As a consequence of the combination of these two traditions it is the *works* of men that are, as hypostasized works, tested by the fire. This change was surely facilitated by the role and function of hypostasized

⁴⁴ See also *Sib. Or.* 8:411 and *Apoc. Pet.* 6. In 2 *Bar.* 48:39, the fire seems to be a punishment rather than a means of testing people (sinners). The idea of a (river of) fire testing men in order to distinguish the good from the bad seems to derive from Persian belief. See on this esp. Lang, *ThWNT* 6.932-33 and Heiligenthal, *Werke*, 262.

⁴⁵ Cf. Heiligenthal, *Werke*, 248.