

Series: HOW TO BLOW UP A CHURCH (in 4 easy lessons!)

October 14, 2007

SUBMIT YOUR RESUME!

1 Corinthians 4:1-21

I. INTRO

A. Years ago after Lori and I finished our addition to our home, we decided to create a patio out of left-over cement patio stones. To lay something like that properly, you have to dig down and put in a layer of limestone screenings. So, we got a load of limestone—and I started digging. What I hadn't anticipated was the ground being rock hard—absolutely packed—because a backhoe had been driving back and forth on it.

-I could barely get the shovel to penetrate more than an inch! So, I was literally jumping up into the air onto the shovel. I know. I'm an idiot. And that day I **proved** that I was an idiot. At one point, the ground was **so** hard, the shovel didn't even penetrate—and I lost my balance and fell backwards. I never saw it coming—I mean, the bare metal handle of the wheelbarrow behind me. And it plowed a furrow right up my lower back! I still have the scar, I'll show you...

1. My break-through learning is that when you're digging through something **really** hard, an amazing person invented something years ago—called a **pick**. I used it—and, voila! No more back injuries.
2. There are things that get hard—besides dirt. Like our hearts, our attitudes, our judgments. And one of the hardest substances known to man—rumored to even be harder than diamonds—is **pride**. Not only is pride hard—tough to break—it hardens everything else. And if something's going to break through, it usually has to be sharp. Pointed. Sometimes painful.

B. The irony about pride is that everyone I know hates it—especially when they see it in others. Arrogance is one of the most obnoxious things in the world. But we're often totally blind to pride when it shows up in us. And it's not like we would ever admit it; "You know, my biggest problem is that I'm so doggone arrogant."

-Paul is desperately trying to get through to a church that is self-destructing on its own pride. He's told them that they're acting like babies by dividing over leaders. He's told them that their brand of spirituality—which was all about them, and had no cross in it—was a bunch of hot air, the very wisdom God had rejected. He told them that they needed to be careful because they were building out of junk—and there would be a final building inspection.

-But he's saved his hardest, most pointed words, to hammer through the core problem. Arrogance.

-These words are for us, too. We're just as vulnerable to pride and arrogance as any generation has ever been. Listening to what the Spirit is saying could save us from a lifetime of pain—and that's a **good** thing.

II. TOUGH LOVE...FOR A TOUGH JOB!

- A. Now, let me tell you what made Paul's job here virtually impossible—apart from the power of God. These weren't people who were united in their respect for his leadership. In fact, they were a pretty snotty bunch. Listen to their exact words, as they were reported back to Paul:

..."His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing."
(2 Corinthians 10:10 NIV)

They're a tough crowd—and he's dealing with them by letter. Most people would say, "You know what—these people aren't worth the effort."

But Paul knew that the entire witness of Jesus to this city was at stake. So he goes right after them. Let's read his words:

So look at Apollos and me as mere servants of Christ who have been put in charge of explaining God's mysteries. Now, a person who is put in charge as a manager must be faithful. As for me, it matters very little how I might be evaluated by you or by any human authority.

I don't even trust my own judgment on this point. My conscience is clear, but that doesn't prove I'm right. It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide. So don't make judgments about anyone ahead of time—before the Lord returns.

For he will bring our darkest secrets to light and will reveal our private motives.

Then God will give to each one whatever praise is due

(1 Corinthians 4:1-5 NLT).

1. Just a note at this point. One of the things that stands out in this whole section is how Paul refers to Apollos and himself. So far, he's said, "Why would you single Apollos and me out; you're God's field; we're just his servants. Migrant workers doing different jobs."

-And then here, **mere servants**. The wording he uses is for Galley slaves--rowers on the bottom deck of a Greek trireme. These people were **really** into hierarchy. See, the Roman world they were raised in was **really** into that stuff—and it determined where you lived, what you wore—even when you ate.

Slaves and servants were at the bottom of the food chain. No one aspired to that. But that's where Paul placed himself. He says, "We aren't **your** servants; we aren't **accountable** to you. We are bottom level servants of Jesus Christ—serving **you** on **His** behalf.

2. And **then** Paul takes out the pick and goes after pride. Brace yourselves!

Dear brothers and sisters, I have used Apollos and myself to illustrate what I've been saying. If you pay attention to what I have quoted from the Scriptures, you won't be proud of one of your leaders at the expense of another. What makes you better than anyone else? What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if all you have is from God, why boast as though you have accomplished something on your own?

You think you already have everything you need.

You think you are already rich. You have begun to reign in God's kingdom without us! I wish you really were reigning already, for then we would be reigning with you. Instead, I sometimes think God has put us apostles on display, like prisoners of war at the end of a victor's parade, condemned to die. We have become a spectacle to the entire world—to people and angels alike.

Our dedication to Christ makes us look like fools, but you claim to be so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are so powerful! You are honored, but we are ridiculed. Even now we go hungry and thirsty, and we don't have enough clothes to keep warm. We are often beaten and have no home. We work wearily with our own hands to earn our living. We bless those who curse us. We are patient with those who abuse us. We appeal gently when evil things are said about us. Yet we are treated like the world's garbage, like everybody's trash—right up to the present moment (1 Corinthians 4:6-13 NLT).

When I read that, I want to say, "That doesn't sound polite! Why would Paul get so pointed—so *in-your-face*?" Remember my illustration about the pick?

When the soil in a person's heart is packed hard by pride—and their soul is at stake—it's like the dirt in my backyard. Only something hard and pointed will get through.

-Randy Frazee, author of **The Connecting Church**, tells about a very successful but incredibly arrogant man in one of his churches who came up to him one day all excited. He said, "I know that some people think I am arrogant and impatient. I know they think that about me, but I have thought about this long and hard; and, Pastor Randy, it's really not me! I would not appear so arrogant and I wouldn't be so impatient if the people around me weren't so stupid!" He said, "Are you understanding what I'm saying? It's not my fault; it's *their* fault!" So I said, "You know what? I feel the exact same way you do." He said, "I *knew* it wasn't just me!" Randy said, "Dude, I am *kidding*! That's the *stupidest* thing I've ever heard!" Then this guy said, "See, you're one of those people I'm talking about."

3. Paul asks some *very* pointed questions. Like, "Who *asked* you to pass judgment on me? Who asked for your opinion? And why would you state it and defend it as if it were fact?"

-It's very clear—they *had* passed judgment on Paul. Truth is--judging is one of the main characteristics of arrogant people. How much did their assessment of his job performance matter to him? *Very little!* Paul said, "You know what? I don't even do a good job of judging myself. I have a clear conscience—but even that doesn't matter.

-There's another time and another place for the final assessment—and it won't be done by you! It will be done by someone who will know everything. All my secrets! All my motives. And it will be based on my faithfulness."

-This whole judgment thing, friends, is something we have to be really careful with. One of the ways pride is seen in our lives is how impressed—and *enmeshed* we are in our own opinions. And that's usually seen in how often we share them—even when they aren't asked for. And what we do with people who don't agree with us. Our judging hurts people and blows up churches.

- Having an opinion is not a bad thing—it's a good thing. **If** we have some basis on which to make a judgment. The issue is specifically passing final judgment on people—and insisting that our opinion is **right**. Needing to have everyone pay attention to your opinion—and needing to be right—is a pride issue.
4. Something else, and this is **really** important. Our sense of how **right** we are is sometimes dependent on our wealth and education and success—because that's who gets quoted in the media. And this can get dragged right into the church—where people who are seen as cool, successful or prestigious in the world system think their opinions are just as important in the church.
- Paul asks some **very** pointed questions: **What makes you better than anyone else?** Ow!
- a. I think we would all do well to answer that question before we pontificate on issues, don't you? Sometimes we just assume that we have something important to say—when all it's actually just **our** opinion. Flawed. Limited. Based on a tiny slice of time. Our arrogance—our need to be right—for everyone to stop and listen when we speak is based on thinking that we're better than others. That's **awful** stuff!
- b. Another pointed question that proud people need to ask themselves: **What do you have that you haven't been given?** The answer to this question, of course, is—**nothing!** We've been **given** all the raw materials for life; a body, strength, brains, opportunities—usually dependent on where we were born. If you trace your life backwards—it's **all** been a gift!
- A really smart scientist apparently boasted to God one day that making humans out of dirt was no big deal—and he was going to prove that he could do it, too. God said, "Great—but you've got to create your **own** dirt!"
- c. Of course the final question is, **And if all you have is from God, why boast as though you have accomplished something on your own?** Good question—to which there is no acceptable answer!
5. What Paul says next must've created a few rosy faces when it got read in front of the church. It's one of the most potent forms of communication—called **sarcasm**. **Wow, you're rich! you've arrived! Boy, I just hope I can be like you someday. Can I touch you, cause—ssst! you're hot! Does God make an appointment to talk to you before He makes any important decisions? I mean, everyone else is struggling, but not YOU! You de man!**
- And in contrast to their arrogance, Paul describes himself and the other disciples. He uses an image every single one of these people had seen in their lifetime. The Roman army marching home from a victorious military campaign—with all the POWs getting dragged in chains behind them—humiliated, and condemned to die. Paul says, "Yep! You, of course, are at the **front** of the parade; we're dragged behind." You're wise; we look like fools. You're powerful—we're weak. You're honored; we're ridiculed."
- What he says about their humiliation, their weakness, their suffering and their need was absolutely incomprehensible to a group of people who had believed that money, success and prestige were all signs of whether or not you had the blessing of God.
6. After this really tough section, Paul closes with something that is startlingly tender. **I'm your Dad! And I love you more than I can say!** .
- I am not writing these things to shame you, but to warn you as my beloved children. For even if you had ten thousand others to teach you about Christ,**

you have only one spiritual father. For I became your father in Christ Jesus when I preached the Good News to you. So I urge you to imitate me (1 Corinthians 4:14-16 NLT).

-What was Paul like? Well—he was a servant. Someone who had both feet on the ground. Someone who loved extravagantly no matter what happened. He says, I want you to imitate me! I imitate Jesus—you imitate me. I'm your **Dad!**

-Anyone here ever get disciplined by their Dad? When I was a kid, I got disciplined like most kids. Dad even did a little experimenting with by taking our punishment—like Jesus. He told my brother, "This time I'll take your spanking!" I'm not sure what happened there, but I always had to pay the price for my own sins! But after my Dad disciplined me, he would always come to my room, tell me why—and then lavishly reaffirm his love. I am **so** grateful that someone loved me enough to stop me. Good parents **do** that! That's why Paul says that there are a lot of teachers in life, but only **ONE** Dad!

- B. You could call what Paul does with the Corinthians an **Intervention**. Anyone seen the show, by that name? It typically follows a person who's on a dangerous, self-destructive track with drugs, alcohol, an eating disorder—or even an addiction to gambling or shopping. These are typically bright, gifted people whose lives have totally spun out of control—and are dragging their friends and family members down with them.
- A counselor meets with the family, and together they gather the courage to say really tough things about how their addiction is destroying lives and relationships. And they demand that they get help. "We will **not** just stand by and watch you kill yourself!"
1. Why would Paul get so cranked up about their pride? I mean, maybe it's just a phase they're going through. In the States, the term for the second year of high school or university is...**Sophomore**. It's a Greek term. Sophos—meaning "wise." Moros—meaning, "moron or fool." A person has just enough education to make them a wise moron. A know it all. Maybe that's where they were at? Sophomore Christians!
- But **Paul** knew how dangerous arrogance is. See, he was once an extremely arrogant religious leader. Jesus planned an intervention for him—and he got knocked right off his horse. And he had to start all over again.
2. I'd say that pride is **the single most dangerous sin** for your heart to get hooked into. Listen to these verses from Proverbs:
Pride leads to disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. Pride leads to conflict; those who take advice are wise. Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall. Pride ends in humiliation, while humility brings honor (Proverbs 11:2, 13:10, 16:18; 29:23).
- And spiritual pride is the worst kind of pride. Pride was what ultimately created Satan—and hell. Pride ruins everything it touches. And pride and self-promotion are the antithesis of **everything** God is about and **everything** the cross stands for and **everything** God longs to see in our lives.
- Ultimately—pride can alienate us from God for all eternity.

III. Rx FOR RESUME LOVERS

- A. As I see it, the world we live in is a set up when it comes to pride. Particularly in North America—and particularly in the suburbs of cities like Toronto.
1. Most of us grew up in the era of **self-esteem**. Self esteem—liking yourself, accepting yourself is a really **good** thing. Where it gets twisted in our world is

when children are told from the day they're born that they're **different** from other children. They're not just special—they're **more** special, **more** intelligent, **more** clever, **more** artistic, **more** athletic.

-And if there are any conflicts with other kids, or even teachers, **they're** right—and Mom and Dad will take on the whole school system to prove it. Helping a child see how valuable and important they are—and what potential they have--is a wonderful thing. But when it becomes a means of comparison to other people—it can be deadly. Know why? Because one of the qualities that is **absolutely essential** to getting along with God and others is something called humility.

2. If we don't come to grips with who we **really** are, we can get launched into the world of resumes—where the deal really does become all about talent and gifts and earning capability to achieve, succeed, make money and earn applause—all the things the world system says **make** you somebody.

-And when you are successful—**you de man!** With success and wealth comes power and people who tell you how wonderful you are and wait for hour to talk to you. This is what everyone wants—and it's like spiritual cyanide.

-I'll tell you what happens. The soil in our hearts gets harder and harder and harder. And the truth of what God has to say about the reality of our condition without Him—sometimes just bounces off and we actually believe our own resume. It sounds...**nicer!**

-By the way, did you ever notice that resumes are all about all the good stuff; the achievements and successes and wins?. No one ever talks about their dark side—or includes anyone on their list of references who doesn't like them. By the way, resumes aren't evil or bad. I have a resume—at least I did until I got to this point in my writing. In all good conscience, had to blue box it!

-Jesus said there's no true greatness without humility. In a world like ours, if we're not careful, we can vaccinate ourselves and our children against **true** humility and, therefore, **true** greatness. What we really end up with is all the hot air that's inflated our self-importance.

3. God loves us too much to allow us too much to let that happen without an intervention. I've been through a few interventions with God. I wouldn't recommend them. They're messy and tough and humiliating. If there was another way to deal with pride—than go through an intervention, would you want to know what it is? Paul tells us.

- B. Let me read the very last verse of this passage:

Some of you have become arrogant, thinking I will not visit you again. But I will come—and soon—if the Lord lets me, and then I'll find out whether these arrogant people are just big talkers or whether they really have God's power. For the Kingdom of God is not just fancy talk; it is living by God's power.

Which do you choose? Should I come with punishment and scolding, or should I come with quiet love and gentleness?

(1 Corinthians 4:19-21 NLT)?

See the choice? A tough intervention in person—or quiet love and gentleness. Which would you choose? There are some verses that spell out the alternative a little more clearly:

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honour (James 4:10 NLT).

So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor (1 Peter 5:6 NLT).

1. Anyone catch what it is? **Humble yourself!** That's what Paul has been saying in a **whole** variety of ways all through this letter so far.

*I am a **servant** of Jesus Christ

*God has chosen the foolish things of this world to shame the wise—like preaching

*I'm just a migrant worker; a bottom level galley slave

*We're dragged at the end of the parade like POWs condemned to die.

***We are treated like the world's garbage, like everybody's trash—right up to the present moment.**

2. Paul, this amazing leader says, "Imitate me--if you dare--as I imitate Jesus." And what did Jesus' life say about humility? He had it all. Resumes don't get any better than his. God. Created the universe. Perfect. All of Heaven bows before me. Didn't go to university—but I am the origin of **all** knowledge. Have an excellent relationship with all my employees—although, I did have to fire about a third of them after a corporate takeover attempt.
 - But then Jesus left it **all** behind. Stepped out of heaven. Gave up his rights and privileges as God. Was born in a barn. Nursed, was potty trained—taught to walk and talk about a teenage mother. Worked for 30 years in obscurity as a construction worker. Served and taught—and then was rejected and died like a common criminal. Jesus went down, down, down, down—to the grave.
 - Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11 NLT).**
 - You won't read that in the Wall Street Journal, or Time or The Toronto Star—but **that** friends--**that** is the path of greatness. It's the way of the cross.
 - You **humble** yourself—and you **serve**. You stop bringing your resume to God—and to church. Paul talked about the day he shredded his resume.
 - After listing the things he used to once brag about, he says:

I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them...worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage (skubala!), so that I could gain Christ and become one with him (Philippians 3:7-9a NLT).

By the way, it took an intervention for Paul to come to the conclusion that his list of achievements was a big steaming pile of **skubala**.

3. The servanthood—humbling yourself thing is not easy. I've fought it just about every time. I remember one day, I was out in this little church in the mountains of Pennsylvania mowing the church lawn. I'm not proud of my attitude—but I resented it. I thought, "Isn't there anyone else who could do this?" And God put his finger right through my chest into my heart, "Like someone else less important than **you? Who do you think you are?**"

-Anyone here besides me who has every found themselves occasionally preening themselves; glancing at their resume and comparing themselves to others? Or getting a little huffy when someone begs to differ with you? Or offering your opinions like you're giving someone a diamond ring? If you do, let me suggest some exercises. In fact, these could help us all!

- a. Arrogance and pride are usually found in a person who knows a little about some things—but thinks they know a lot about everything. The next time someone asks you about a subject, here's what I want you to say:

“I don't know. What do *you* think?”

Let's try it together. For some of you—that will be tougher than you can imagine.

- b. A second suggestion. If someone asks you about a subject and you give them an opinion, I want you to follow that up with,

“...But I *may* be wrong.” Try it.

- c. Finally, learning servanthood is a ***must***. This is really important for ***all*** of us. We need to find a place where we serve the poor. Where we learn humility—and model it.

And not with a ***“Here I am to help you...to save your day, you poor wayward unfortunate soul!”*** But to learn from the poor—and serve them like we would serve Jesus.

-That's what Jesus modeled. When his closest followers weren't getting it, the night before he died, he did the job only the lowest of slaves would do; he stripped to his underwear and washed everyone's feet. The next day as he hung naked on the cross, they ***got the POINT!***

4. I want to say something very important to you. If you follow the Church of Jesus down through history, you will find that it has been at its ***very*** worst when it's been in a place of power, privilege and influence. The reason? Because when that happens—typically the leaders don't serve; they ***get*** served. And that reverses what Jesus said. The Son of Man did not come to ***be*** served, but to serve and give his life away for others.

-What can you expect of the leaders here at The Olive Branch? You can expect—and ***should*** expect humility—and servanthood—and servants hearts. Our goal as a staff and as leaders is to be like Jesus. There is no job we are above doing. If we aren't—then you need to call us on it. Because, see, no servant, no slave, is above their Master. I'm trying to say this in the right way...imitate us...as we imitate Jesus. That's our calling—and it's the highest calling there is.

IV. CLOSING

- A. I don't want to finish life on some hot air balloon ride, do you? Cause, see, balloons are very vulnerable to ***getting the point***.
-I'd rather go through an intervention. I'd rather ask ***myself*** the questions,

What makes you better than anyone else? What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if all you have is from God, why boast as though you have accomplished something on your own (1 Corinthians 4:7 NLT)?

- B. Today I want to come to the cross. I want to take the bread and wine—and remember the servanthood of God Himself. I want to pour contempt on all my pride. And I want to spend my life handing out Jesus' resume—not mine. I hope you'll join me.