

Series: *HOW TO BLOW UP A CHURCH!* October 7, 2007

BUILD WITH FLAMMABLE STUFF
1 Corinthians 3:10-20

I. INTRO

- A. My Dad used to do something I call *friendship fishing*. If he wanted to get to know someone—or help someone find their way to God—he would sometimes take them fishing on the Beaver River—one of the many rivers that all converge on Pittsburgh. So, he had this little 14 foot aluminum boat with an outboard motor.

-One day, a few years ago, he was driving through town taking his boat to the river for a friendship fishing expedition—when he noticed the people in town waving to him. He smiled and waved back thinking, “That’s nice! They’re sure being friendly today.” That is until he noticed a glow in the rear view mirror. Apparently a spark from his battery had ignited the gas tank for his outboard motor—and he was pulling a boat with a ball of flames coming from the back!

-By the time he saw it—and the town fire department had arrived—it had burned his motor to a crisp—and melted the whole back off his boat!

-Bu-u-ut—no one was hurt, the insurance paid for the boat and motor, and it’s one of those crazy family memories we’ll never forget. I wish I had a photo--my Dad—the *flaming fisherman!*

- B. Most of the time, however, there is absolutely no humor in a fire. Horrifying would be more like it.
None of the breakfast guests at the restaurant, *Windows On The World*, located on the 106 and 107 floors of the WTC, North Tower, ever thought of fire on Sept. 11, 2001.

1. This massive 50,000 sq. foot restaurant had a spectacular view of the Manhattan skyline—and brought in more money than any other restaurant in the US--\$37 million a year. The Tower it sat on had been built to withstand earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, bombs—and even getting hit by a plane.

-But the heat from burning jet fuel weakened the main structural beams; and at 10:28 a.m., less than 2 hours after the fire started, the whole tower collapsed--all 109 floors—1300 feet of concrete, steel and glass.

2. At 10:28 that day, all the revenue ceased. The \$25 million dollar renovation was worth nothing. The foundation—a magnificent tower that represented all the wealth and achievements of western capitalism—gone. All the reservations made, all the gourmet food, recipes, fine wines—the magnificent window on the world—all gone.

-But the *stuff* was *nothing* compared to the loss of human life: Sons, daughters, husbands, boyfriends, girlfriends, Dad’s, Moms—all gone in a single act of hatred from people willing to die for their cause.

3. On Thanksgiving, we show our gratitude to God for **all** we have been given. And we have truly been given a **massive** amount—more than anyone in any previous generation—more than most of the people in the world.
 -But gratitude—and the focus of our lives—needs to be built on something better than the buildings, cars, money, food and stuff we have at this moment in history. Our lives, to last, can't be perched on top of a tower that seems solid—but has a shelf life with an unpublished expiration date. I want to build a life that **lasts!** And I'll bet you do too! So today, I want to talk, not just about Thanksgiving—but how to make Thanksgiving last forever.

II. WHAT LIES BENEATH...!

- A. Everyone wants what they have to last—unless, of course, they have the flu! One of the questions everyone asks when they buy a house, a car, a HD TV or a computer is, **How long will it last? How can I extend the shelf-life?**
1. Paul, an early church leader, has made a significant investment of his life in the people of Corinth—the ones he's writing this letter to. He had helped them find their way to God, and re-orient their lives toward the way He was making all things new through His Son, Jesus Christ. With that in mind, listen to what Paul says: **You are God's building. Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:9a-11 NLT).**
 -Paul seems to love architectural imagery—and he's writing to a culture that **loved** building things. He goes after the obvious. That if a building is going to last—it needs a great foundation. And no junk.
 In fact, for **anything** structural to have any kind of shelf life, it needs to have a good, solid foundation.
 -Jesus made that clear, too. One day after a very profound message, he said to his followers, and I'm paraphrasing, "Don't be stupid about what you build your life on! The storms **will** come—and if you spend a lot of time and effort and money building a house on the beach—there **will** come a day when you'll be sorry!
 -So. What's a decent foundation that will last? Jesus didn't just say that His teaching was a foundation; he said, **Anyone who listens to my teaching AND FOLLOWS IT is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock (Matthew 7:24 NLT).**
2. Paul says, **That's the foundation I put down. Jesus Christ.** What does that mean? Well, what it means is actually pretty substantial.
 -Jesus wasn't just talking about following wise advice about life's issues and problems—like most religious teachers. Jesus, God's Son laid aside his privilege and power as the Son—and came here to inaugurate a plan to set the whole world right. He told us the truth about the Father—and about the fact that He was the Son of God—that He was the way to the Father.

-Our response was to nail him to a cross. God then raised Him from the dead—and made a way for **all** people to come back to him, to find grace and hope and be a part of his plan to set the world right. The cross is at the core of everything God is doing in this world;

To deal with the brokenness and destruction sin has caused to people, to the whole world system, and to the entire ecology of the planet. ***That's the foundation! It's in Jesus Christ and what He's done for us all!***

4. And Jesus asks to be the foundation of every life—your life and mine. It's not a matter of saying a nice prayer—and then going on to live your life however you want to live it. Remember the stew pot from last week? Jesus will not be another nice ingredient in your life to help you reach the Canadian dream. Jesus will not be a ladder to help you reach higher and higher rungs of religious superiority. He asks to be **Lord**. You know, where we do what He says—not just believing that He's brilliant—but that He's **right!** To make Him your foundation means that He leads—and you follow—believing that **He** knows where to go and you don't.
 - Making Jesus Christ your foundation in life has huge implications for how you live, your attitudes toward others, what you buy, and where you invest your talent and your resources. It means that His opinion, His leadership, His sacrifice for you, His teaching forms the foundation for all you do.

-Paul makes it **so** clear here. "I laid the foundation. There **is** no other foundation! It's not Jesus Christ **and** money, or Jesus **and** success, or Jesus **and** Mary, or Jesus **and** the church I used to go to. It's **Jesus Christ!**

- B. But Paul then delves into something we don't always talk about: ***What gets built*** on that foundation **really** matters! Let's have Paul speak for himself:

Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames (1 Corinthians 3:12-15 NLT).

1. These followers of Jesus in Corinth, spiritually speaking, were extremely vulnerable. They didn't own Bibles; this whole way of life was all new to them; and they had come from a culture that was **opposite** to the way of Jesus that Paul had told them about. Pretty much all they had to go on was what they remembered of Paul and Apollos' teaching. Period.

-Some of their problems started when **other** teachers who were really into the street corner wisdom and philosophy and secrets came along with stuff that contradicted Paul and Apollos. It fits what they **want** to hear, what sounds familiar to them—but has nothing to do with building a life that's honoring to Jesus Christ. Jesus had flipped the org chart on **everyone!** He said that in his new

community—leaders are people who serve, not bosses who tell everyone else what to do. He changed all the price tags on what matters and **doesn't** matter.

-In fact, the whole system of status they'd been used to was flattened. Slaves are as important to God as Emperors. Money, success, status, influence—all of the usual marks for measuring importance in our world—suddenly become non-important with Jesus.

-The Corinthians were **for** bad teaching—especially teaching that tapped into their desire for secret truth; for being part of an exclusive group. If someone came along with a sales pitch, **You can be the spiritual genius you’ve always wanted to be—sought out by ALL your friends—for just \$29.99. Order today!** They’d have their credit cards whipped out and ready to go!

-When anyone comes along with a system of Jesus **AND**. Jesus and special secrets. Jesus and special gifts. Jesus and my special ability to understand what He was **really** saying...it’s wood, hay and straw.

-When anyone comes along and promises that, with their teaching, they can microwave spirituality or healing into your life with a special prayer—or a special gift—or for a special donation—it’s junk! And it hurts believers.

-In case you’re wondering, Paul didn’t do away with junk once and for all. It’s always been around—and still is. Let me get more specific.

- a. We’re vulnerable to the New Age varieties of this—spirituality without a cross. Spirituality where Jesus is mentioned—even quoted—but where He’s actually irrelevant. Some sources that come to mind are **The Da Vinci Code, The Secret, The Power of Now**. They sound convincing—and there’s even a little bit of good psychology in them—but they’re junk. Wood, hay, and straw. But Jesus isn’t even **close** to being the foundation—or the point—and they’re dangerous.
 - b. Another one that I’ve experienced maybe more than some of you. It’s legalism. Fundamentalism. Teachers that are known for who they don’t agree with—which is almost everyone—for what they don’t do—which is a **lot**—and for the specific kinds of sinners they don’t like. Friends, Jesus said that his followers would be known by the exceptional, extravagant way they loved—not who and what they were against. This stuff, to just be blunt, is toxic and it’s wrong because it claims Jesus—and totally misses his love.
2. Paul’s warning to teachers—like me—makes the hair stand up on the back of my neck! When I teach, I’d better make sure that I’m building into your lives with more than my opinion or what happens to be cool in the Christian community at any given time.

-It had **better** be more than traditions from the past or legalism. It had **better** be more than the latest, coolest author. It had better be more than my bias or my latest favorite hobby horse—or my political persuasion—or headline news—or my favorite version of the end-times.

-According to what Paul says here—it’s **possible** for someone to read, believe, and teach for a life-time—have it “tested” with fire” at the end—and lose it all. If that would happen to me, **I** would escape smelling like smoke, but with **nothing to show for my life**. I can’t imagine anything more tragic.

- 3 There's a great theological classic most of you have either heard or read that addresses the issue of buildings. It goes like this: **One upon a time, there were three little pigs. And the little pigs said, we need to build a house to live in. So one little pig said, 'I know, let's build it out of straw.' And so, they built their house out of straw. And the big bad wolf came and said, 'Let me come in!' And the little pig said...Anyone know what he said? Say it with me, ...'Not by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin!' The big bad wolf said, 'Well, I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!' So he huffed and he puffed and he blew the house down!**

-I'm a little confused about the moral of the story here; it could be to have some hair on your chinny-chin-chin—or **Build well?**

-In the story, the pigs got three shots at building their house right so the wolf wouldn't have pork chops for dinner. We don't. We have one shot at building right. I think about that all the time. Another great church leader, James—half brother of Jesus—says, **Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly James 3:1 NLT).**

-This warning stands in the Bible for **anyone** who teaches—whoever they are. It stands here for every TV evangelist, every seminary professor, every author, every leader in a Christian community, and everyone who has influence over others.

We are accountable—not just for whether we live a morally half-decent life—but for our influence on others.

-Here's the deal. Is there **anyone** here who wants all you've worked for through your **entire** life—to go up in smoke when, according to the imagery here, God puts a match to it to see whether it's good stuff or junk? I don't. I can't imagine anything more shameful, more horrifying than that! So. Build well!

III. THE RIGHT STUFF

- A. Now, another question. When someone has a bunch of junk built into their lives, is it all the fault of the person who **taught** them?

1. Think about it like this. You want to build have an addition put on your home. So, you contact a number of contractors and ask them for quotes. The estimates range between \$90-100,000. You think, "Whew! I'm not prepared to pay **that** much. Your neighbor, Tony, tells you that his cousin Vinny does this stuff all the time and can do it for less. Vinny looks at it and says, "Yeah. It'll cost you, oh, maybe 30 or 40 grand, tops." You say, "Wow! It's a deal! How can I ever thank you!" Vinny says, "Faggedabbaddit."

-I was watching a building show on TV the other night—and someone had spent \$90k for some "Cousin Vinny" to come do the work. It took a **good** contractor and \$70k just to fix Cousin Vinny's mistakes! What cousin Vinny built wasn't even safe to **live** in!

-Now. Is something like that **all** Vinny's fault? Well, he built it. But the owners were ultimately the ones who **trusted** Vinny without looking at anything else he built or talking to anyone else he had worked for!

2. The bottom line, friends, is that **we** are in fact responsible for the foundation we build our lives on. If we choose to trust in money, or success, or the approval of others—or our own ego to build our one and only life on—**we are responsible!**

-And if we choose Jesus Christ as our foundation in life—we are ultimately responsible for what gets built on top of that. If we take short-cuts—that’s what we get. Short-cuts. You’ll never find Jesus—or anyone else in the Bible—saying, “Go ahead! **Believe!** If it **sounds** true—it probably is!” On the contrary—the Bible tells us to be **really** careful what we put into our souls. It warns us about false teachers. About bad teaching that fits what we really **want** to hear, but **isn’t true!** -If someone comes along, and performs signs and wonders, does the Bible say, “It **must** be true—just go with it!” No. The Bible says in 1 John 4, **Test** the spirits!” In other words, “If you let someone touch your soul, you’d better make sure they have clean hands!”

-Let me illustrate this with a drawing [**cameras—focus in?**] You’re building something and it’s just a **little** off to start with—you think, “No big deal.” But as you **build** on that part that’s off, it doesn’t automatically straighten up. It gets skewed further and further from the truth.

3. I think one of the issues we have to deal with in our culture is the word **Christian**. When the word Christian is used in the Bible, it’s used **once**—and it’s used as a **noun: The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch (Acts 11:26b TNIV).**

-The word **Christian** works really well as a noun. But it works **very** poorly as an adjective. As in **Christian** teaching, **Christian** bookstore, **Christian** music, **Christian** movies. There is stuff in our world called **Christian** teaching that is, in fact, **not** good teaching. Just because something is sold in a **Christian** bookstore doesn’t mean that it’s safe to read and believe and put into practice. And sometimes **Christian** music or art isn’t good art or good music.

-I’m not trying to be critical of other believers; I’m just saying that just because someone is a Christian and has written a book or a song doesn’t make it good and helpful. What am I saying? Just like you have to **choose carefully** and be responsible for who you let work on your car, who you let babysit your kids, who you let handle your money—**BE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHO YOU LET TOUCH YOUR SOUL AND BUILD INTO YOUR LIFE.**

5. I think there are some things to watch out for when it comes to this whole deal of foundations and buildings.
- a. I’ve already mentioned this—but sometimes the whole foundation is wrong. People may use the word “Christian”—but Jesus Christ and what He taught isn’t the foundation. One example of this would be Mormonism; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The whole belief system is founded on the teachings of a man named Joseph Smith. He claimed to find a bunch of golden plates in the hills of Palmyra, NY. And then an angel gave him a giant pair of glasses to read them. Funny thing, though—no one ever saw the plates but him. Mormons **use** the name of Jesus, but what they teach has nothing to do with the teachings of Jesus.

- b. Sometimes the foundation is solid—it's based on Jesus Christ—but what's being built/taught is wrong. I'm ashamed to say that *I've* taught stuff that's not accurate. One time in my early years of teaching, a woman came up to me after some guilt-inducing message I'd just given and said, "I'm sorry, but I just can't live my life for Jesus under that kind of pressure!"

-As I looked more deeply into what I'd just taught—I realized that I was **wrong!** Even though I'd heard other people teach the same thing. I had ripped the verses right out of their context—not because that was what God was saying to every believer, but because it fit what **I** wanted to say. ***It just wasn't true!*** I had to apologize—which is pretty humbling.

-Let me say this. Some of the most prevalent teaching in our day is that Jesus wants all his followers to be healthy and rich and successful—and if you aren't, you don't have enough faith. That, friends it the Canadian dream wrapped in the Bible--but it's **not** the Gospel Jesus taught! If it's **true**, it's true for **everyone**—not just a few. We just have to be **really** careful that we don't get sucked in by what we **want** to believe—because smiling successful people say it.

- c. My point is—don't check your brain at the door! Not here. Not anywhere. Some teaching is driving by anger or frustration people have toward the church—not be the consistent teaching of the Bible. Don't just **assume** that anything is true because you like or admire the person who said it, or because it fits with what other cool people think.

-When someone claims to be a prophet, **ask hard questions.** When someone claims to be teaching straight from the Bible, **ask hard questions!** See if it agrees with the **whole** Bible—or just the few verses they've quoted. Don't accept something because it fits what you've always wanted to believe. Don't automatically believe everything you read because someone sounds sincere and comes from people who make sacrifices, are successful, have a lot of degrees, or speak in a lot of important places.

-You don't want to get way down the road building something into your life that's junk! See, the deal is that you have to **live** in what you build!

- B. The **most** important part of this teaching has to do, I believe, with what we build into others. Whether or not we realize it—we **do** build into others. People we work with, worship with—and especially people in our own home. Here's what the Bible says:

Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you need to become a fool to be truly wise.

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As the Scriptures say, “He traps the wise in the snare of their own cleverness.” And again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise; he knows they are worthless (1 Corinthians 3:16-20 NLT).”

1. Paul has been using this whole metaphor of a building—and what gets build into it. Now he brings it home. His temple was not in Jerusalem, and it’s not St. Peter’s in Rome—and it’s not The Olive Branch. God’s temple, God’s building **gathers** here, but buildings in and of themselves are not holy and sacred. The place God is building—and dwells in--is made of **people**. It’s **people** God cares most about. It’s **people** who will last forever.
 - What Paul is saying here is so critical to understand. God is **deeply** concerned with what we build into others. If we build into others junked up attitudes—or damage what God is building into others with junked up attitudes—we are accountable to God as well. Paul says, **God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.** God is **very** serious about what He’s building—because He’s building for eternity. Jealousy, self-centeredness, greed, lust, pride. All this stuff contaminates what God wants to do. So—let’s be **careful** how we handle other’s lives, okay?

2. You may be thinking right about now, “Wow! Good thing I’m not a teacher! I wouldn’t want **that** responsibility hanging over me!” Truth is, you can’t escape it! We **all** teach something to somebody with our influence. That’s what Jesus taught, remember, when He said, “You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.” Where you work, where you live, where you hang out and work out—you have influence.
 - Through your influence, the Gospel of Jesus is either Good News through your life—or **not-so-good** news. The influence thing is a **really** powerful thing—and a really **good** thing. It means that you can make a huge difference with your life. If only **one** person is changed because of you—they in turn cut a swath through this world and touch **hundreds**—maybe **thousands** of others. And **God** sees that!
 - But it is a double-edged sword. If what you do is mainly about you—or you’re a self-pre-occupied, rude person who hurts others with what you say and do—that’s the **Gospel** you preach, regardless of what you believe. So—build on the **good** side of influence!

3. Finally—this stuff really hits home as a parent. Today after the 11 a.m. service, parents will be dedicating children. That is, bringing their children to Jesus to ask for His blessing and His help in raising them to follow Him. The deal is that our children read us every day like a book. That’s how they learn to talk, walk, react, treat others. They’re watching **all the time!**
 - You could say that we are helping them build their lives—in fact, building into their lives. Every day with our lives, with the choices we make, the things we do, we either teach that Jesus is the **right** foundation; or that Jesus is the **right** foundation to **talk** about, but when it comes to really important stuff, money, success, sports, entertainment, being right—whatever—is what really counts.

-All I'm saying is that if God has given you children—He has placed their tender souls—learning all the time—under **your** care, **your** value system, **your** teaching and **your** influence. I think, when it's all said and done—whatever you've accomplished with your life, whatever money and titles you've earned, towers you've built—you will want what you've built into their lives to last. You love them more than your life, right? You just have to be careful that the pace of life—the cares and worries of living in a crazy world like ours, doesn't take over what you want to build.

IV. THANKS FOR THE *RIGHT* THINGS

- A. Today is my **first** Thanksgiving since I lost my parents. I'm thankful for the food I enjoy, for all the ways God has blessed my life—in ways I totally don't deserve. But when I look down into my heart—it's not what I would carry out of a burning building. What I'm **most** grateful for is a wife and lover like Lori—for each of my children. For good friends. For all the people in my life.
- B. And I'm **really** grateful for the foundation my parents put under with my life—with what they taught and especially what they **lived**. That's their legacy—and it's my responsibility to think about it and be grateful for it.

-Who has built into the building of your life? If it's solid; if it's gold, silver and precious stones—do two things. Thank **God** for it lavishly before you eat the turkey. And then, by the grace of Jesus, pass it on!