

Series: HOW TO BLOW UP A CHURCH... in 4 easy lessons
September 23, 2007

CHOOSE SIDES

1 Corinthians.1:10-17; 3:1-9; 16-22

I. INTRO

- A. It's funny, isn't it, how people typify themselves. Any **dog** people here? How about **cat** people? Any **bird** people? Then, of course, there are morning people and night owls, clean freaks and....slobs? No, let's say people who have **more important** things to do with their time than clean! People persons and people who **need** their space. SUV people and **Hybrid** people. **Mac** people—the **cool** people, and PC **nerds**.

-And a **lot** of people typify themselves and build friendships based on the kind of **music** they listen to. By the way, know how many music genres there are? **Limewire** lists 123. Let me give you a taste:

A capella, Acid, Acid jazz, Acid punk, Acoustic, AfterRock, Alternative, Ambient, Avantgarde, Ballad, Bass, Bebop, Big Band, Bluegrass, Blues, Booty bass, Cabaret, Celtic, Chamber music, Chanson, Chorus, Christian Rap, Classic Rock, Classical, Club, Comedy, Country. And that's just the ABC's!

-As I see it, it's our **passion** for something we love or are drawn to that causes us to identify ourselves as metal-heads, dog-lovers, Harley-drivers, aggies, or whatever group we've identified ourselves with.

- B. It's our **passion** for something we love or feel drawn to that causes us to identify ourselves with a particular group. But as I see it, **passion** works both ways. It draws us to people who agree with us, and that's not a bad thing. But it also can make those who **don't** agree with us our enemies! Passion drives some very, **very** good causes in our world—like saving the world, saving the environment, helping the poor, dealing with run-away diseases, and solving major problems.

1. But passion **also** fuels radical fundamentalism, racism, hatred, contempt and pride. Passion for the wrong things has splintered—and **continues** to splinter our world. And it has splintered followers of Jesus. And **that's** where it gets tragic—because our mission isn't about being right, about getting everyone to believe like we do about the end times. Our mission is—and our **passion** should be about loving God and loving others so much that **they** want to love God too.

-In reality, our mission is changing the world, one person at a time—and we can only do that when we love everyone—not just **our** brand of people!

2. Satan has a strategy for stopping God's plan to love and save the world. And his strategy has been **incredibly** effective. It's...**Divide and conquer**. You can conquer almost anything if you can divide it. Families, communities...and, of course, believers in Jesus.

-Like us, the people who made up this church we're studying came from a splintered culture—and they dragged that stuff right into their church.

3. So—we have to talk about passion—and the division it can cause between us and others. My question is this:

Am I hurting what God wants to do in me and in my community...and through my life...by choosing sides?" Are you okay with that? So, remember—I have **your** permission to get into the messy stuff, okay!

II. VOTE...NOW!

- A. The author of this book Paul, makes it clear right up front that the biggest mess he's dealing with in this church has to do with division. And, when you look behind the scenes—it makes perfect sense. They were arrogant. They thought they had arrived—and that even Paul, the one who had started the church, didn't have anything of substance to say to them. Pride **inevitably** creates problems; especially division. So he goes right after this stuff:

I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters. Some of you are saying, "I am a follower of Paul." Others are saying, "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Peter," or "I follow only Christ." Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not (1 Corinthians 1:10-13 NLT)!

1. Paul says, I **beg** you—let there be no divisions! **Live in harmony, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.**
 - Anyone know what harmony is? Listen to this piece just briefly. [CD].
 - Anyone here ever played in an orchestra or band? For it to even sound half-way decent—there needs to be harmony. There are probably over 30 different instruments there—with very different sounds and ranges. But there's harmony because they're tuned to the one note, playing the same song, in the same key—following one conductor. **That's** what Jesus' people are to be like!
 - What if everyone decided to do their own thing—or form little clubs where they tried to drown out the others? I would be noise. Chaos. It would **drive people away**. And **that's** what was going on here.

2. The Corinthians were Greek. What do you think of when you hear the word **Greek?** No, not Greek salad! **Philosophy!** Plato, Aristotle, Socrates!
 - Philosophy was a **big deal** in Corinth! Since they didn't have more cultured entertainment—like TV—or **sports** on TV, people would go out and listen to different speakers—waxing eloquent on some philosophical issue.

 - Ironically, these different speakers had the same goal as Oprah or Larry King Live or the Leafs: to attract the biggest crowds and the richest sponsors possible. And, just as people in our culture get really, **really** passionate about and devoted to **American Idol** or **Metallica**, people in that culture were passionate about their favorite philosophy and orator. In fact, know what the disciples of these different speakers were called? **Zealots!**
 - Zealots are known for the way they try to force others to convert to their cause or point of view. Ever met one?
 - The word **zealot** describes the Corinthians. In fact, as a disciple...or **zealot**...it was their responsibility to broadcast and defend their favorite person—and their

teachings. To the point of putting down the other philosophers and heckling *their* disciples!

3. So, the Corinthian's never even *asked* if this custom they'd been raised with was right or wrong, healthy or unhealthy—they just dragged it into the church. And, as you can predict, it created chaos.

-Paul mentions four groups of zealots: the Paul party, the Apollos party, the Cephas...or Peter Party, and the Christ party.

-The core issue was *not* their passion, or even their preferences. People always tend to identify with a strong leader. It was the divisiveness all this stuff created. **Paul, Paul! He's our man! If he can't do it NO one can! Apollos, Apollos! He's our man...Peter, Peter! He's our man...** Then there was the group, "**We don't follow men; we follow *Christ!***" Doesn't *that* make you want to woof your cookies!

-So—imagine what a gathering of this community might be like. People divided into little teams, arguing who's right. Heckling each other. "You mean you follow **Paul?** The short bald guy with a big nose and a squeaky voice?! What a **loser!**"

- B. There are a lot of reasons why people would've chosen to follow these different teachers and leaders. Loyalty. Admiration. A kindred spirit. Maybe race. But *passion* would be near the top.

-You can almost hear it, "You know—when **Paul** teaches—it's just great. I mean, he talks *right* to where I am! He just sticks to the **Bible**" Apollos is a guy who apparently shouts and yells—and is a **great** debater. "Apollos—what a **stunning communicator!** I could listen to that guy all day. I mean, I was on his website—and I learned so **much!**"

-Then there was Cephas—or Peter. We'd call him Rocky. He's got a whole series of films. "Rocky? He's my brother! He has this **new thing** goin' on.."

-Paul says, "What in the **world** are you doing? You **babies!** You've bought into the whole divisive system of the world—of your culture! What are you **thinking?!** **You're going the wrong way!**" And he *really* goes after them.

1. Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions that get after the craziness of what they're doing. He says:
Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not!

In case they're getting off on who it was that baptized them, Paul says, "I can barely remember **who** I baptized—but it wasn't too many of you! Then:

For Christ didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News—and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power (1 Corinthians 1:13,17 NLT).

- a. Paul says, "Why would you think Jesus could be chopped up into little pieces—with a name on each one? I never asked you to form a fan club in my name? How could you **do** this?"

- b. By the way, can anyone guess what would happen to me if I got hacked up into different pieces? You want a piece of me?! No, you don't. I don't want you to either—because **anything** that gets hacked to pieces—dies. In their church, they were doing a version of the **Texas Chainsaw Massacre!** And it is unthinkable that anyone would do that to Jesus or his mission in the world.
-In fact, it's what Jesus specifically prayed **wouldn't** happen. The night before He died, he prayed that His followers would be **One!** And you need to know—Paul—and all the early leaders of the church took the **ONENESS** of Christ's mission and Christ's purpose and Christ's Body **very** seriously!
- c. Paul deals with another issue here. It's the basis of comparison the Corinthians are using. They took the Neilson ratings to church—the same means of comparison they used with soapbox philosophers. They were rating Paul, Cephas and Apollos on how good of a show they did. The best arguing skills. Who made them cry one minute and laugh the next. Who had the most profound arguments and the best crowd appeal.
-To counter that stuff, Paul says, "I made it a point to **not** try produce the coolest...and **hottest** show in town!
My message—hear it—is about how, in an **amazing** act of grace, God gave his Son over to death so we could have life forever!"
2. Later on in this same passage, Paul goes after divisiveness on a different basis—the fact that God purposely chooses **different** leaders to accomplish **different** things in the hearts and lives of His people. Listen to how Paul puts it:
Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world? When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world? After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building (1 Corinthians 3:1-9 NLT).
- a. These people had so inflated their own egos that they thought they were **thoroughly** spiritual—and Paul deliberately pulls out a pin and sticks it in their balloon!
-He says, "You **babies!** You have just proved how far from maturity you are with your jealousy and divisiveness! How **bizarre** is it that you would be so misled into thinking you've **arrived!**"

- b. When Paul compares himself and Apollos to migrant workers in a field who plant, water, and cultivate crops for the guy who owns the field and the seed. He says, “We don’t own the field or the crops—we’re just migrant workers. Why would you elevate us at the expense of the one who owns the fields?”

-The **point?** All of us teachers are on the same team! We have the same boss, the same goals, the same purpose—to be used by God to **help you grow!** Don’t dishonor Jesus by destroying what He loves—His Body; His People; His Church! the One we work for by taking sides, creating division, and destroying the ultimate result! The **Church** that Christ is building!

3. Then Paul makes this incredible statement in closing:

So don’t boast about following a particular human leader. For everything belongs to you—whether Paul or Apollos or Peter, or the world, or life and death, or the present and the future.

Everything belongs to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God (1 Corinthians 3:21-23 NLT).

-Here’s what He’s saying. “God is speaking truth through each and every one of these teachers. You can learn and grow from **each one of them!** If Paul says it and it’s true, **it’s yours! Claim it!** If Apollos says it and it’s true, **it’s yours!** If Rocky says it and it’s true—**it’s yours!** Why would you shut yourself off from other teachers? The world...**cosmos**—out to the farthest reaches of the universe—if it’s true...it’s yours!

-To put it very simply, “You petty, petty immature babies! Why would you **ever** settle for one thin line of truth when it’s **all yours!** Why? You are of Christ...and Christ is **of God!**

-**What more could you want?** What would the answer be? It might be, “Well, we want to be **right!**”

III. HEROES AND SPLINTERED CHURCHES

- A. Well, because of what Paul wrote there, we have **totally** solve the problem of division--**divide and conquer**—in the church, right? **Right?**

-With 8168 Protestant denominations, it would be pretty hard to make that claim! Here’s my take on denominations in 2007. I think the “I’m a Lutheran, I’m a Presbyterian, I’m an Anglican” thing is dying. Passion...and it’s ugly adopted sister, **divisiveness**...has a way of morphing. And always into something that looks legitimate.

-The past 50 years or so have produced some amazing heroes. I mean, people of real distinction! I’ve brought some of them to you—in the form of books from my office.

1. For example. **Just As I Am** representing Billy Graham. He’s made a **huge** impact on the world. How many of you think that his style should be near the top of the examples churches follow?
- a. How about **Mere Christianity**--C.S. Lewis. This man was **brilliant**. How many of you think that church should be more intellectual—and focus on answering some of the questions that get raised?

- b. **Rediscovering Church**—Bill and Lynn Hybels. Bill, and the church he founded to reach seekers, Willow Creek Community Church—have had a profound influence on my life. Mainly because he links up with my passion for helping people far from God come home. He’s had a huge influence on the church. How many of you would vote for Bill?
- c. Lately I’m listening to/reading people like Rob Bell—author of this book. **Velvet Elvis**. He represents some newer movements of God—Jesus revolutionaries who have encouraged the church to not just **talk** about what Jesus did—but **do** it. How many of you think the church would do well to put his church at the top of our list of examples.
- d. And there’s this book, **The Irresistible Revolution**, by Shane Claiborne. His church movement, **The Simple Way**, has challenged the church on it’s buy-in on a consumptive lifestyle
How it has ignored issues of poverty and social justice in the world. This book has some profound things to say! How many of you think we would do well as a church to put Shane and **The Simple Way** near the top of our influences?
2. This list is **very** incomplete. I could’ve listed others—as you can see, I’ve got **quite** a stack of books. And there are others: Martin Luther King, Jr, John Maxwell, Chuck Swindoll, John Hagee, Erwin McManus, Joel Osteen and Jerry Falwell—each, I might add, who has significant influence—and a specialized ministry.
- Now. Some of you were **very** excited about some of the people I mentioned, right?. How many of you found that at least one of these names made you **angry**? Question: Which of these leaders do you think Jesus loves most? Which one of them has 100% of the truth 100% nailed down in everything they teach and stand for? How many of know all of these really, really well—enough to know what their **heart** is like?
3. This stuff, friends, is **precisely** the 21st century version of what Paul was dealing with. I’m convinced that there are enough issues hidden in any one church—even if it only has 2 people—that if you **pick** at it, you will absolutely **blow it apart!** The division **used** to take place along the lines of denominations and finer points of doctrine. For the most part, that’s dead. Now people are **passionate—zealous** over leaders, authors, issues and movements.
- See, God is **always** at work. He’s always raising up leaders, raising up people to address his church, help his people move into new areas. Open peoples eyes to issues they’ve never seen before. That’s a **great** thing! Thank God for Martin Luther—and Martin Luther King, Jr. Thanks God for John Calvin and John Wesley and Charles Spurgeon and Billy Sunday and Billy Graham. Thank God for Bill Hybels, Rick Warren, Erwin McManus, Rob Bell, Brian MacLaren and Shane Claiborne.
4. Know where passion goes wrong? It’s when we turn it on the member of our own team—and other believers--**instead** of the problem that needs to be solved. And when that happens, we **waste** the energy God gave us to make a difference on judging and arguing.

-What do you do when someone judges or criticizes you? How many of you would say, “**nothing!**” Our instinct is to criticize them, right? And when we do that, we’re not usually accurate. We draw mental and verbal cartoons that exaggerate their weaknesses and minimize their strengths.

-God has given these magnificent passions to His people—for education, for the poor and marginalized, for children, for teens, for overseas outreach. When we turn our passion on others, instead of **seeing** the **beauty** of what they love, we turn it around. “Well, you obviously don’t care about children. You obviously don’t care about teaching the Bible. You obviously don’t care about the poor!” And the passions God has given to **build** the church—**feed** on the church. Like cancer.

-Paul says, “When you are passionate about a leader or a movement or a cause—be **careful to direct your passion at the CAUSE, not your team!** Hurting the church Jesus loves is **very** dangerous. Suffice it to say—God doesn’t put up with it!”

-Paul says, “When you’re passionate about an area of ministry that deeply moves you—be careful. Make sure that your passion isn’t about feeling a little better, a little more spiritual than others—because feelings of superiority in the church are **lethal**.”

-Paul says, “When you’re passionate about a cause, or about what another leader is doing, make sure that everything you do **harmonizes**; becomes part of a way bigger **whole** picture--loving, joyful, patient and transparent.” Personal agendas—doing stuff behind the scenes is **lethal**. Be careful!”

5. This morning, I can **guarantee** you that you have a passion. You have something deep in your heart that drives you—that calls you to action. That is a really good thing—God gave it to you—and it should bring you **joy!** What you need to do is **live** it. To engage. Give yourself to it. Find others to link up with. Make a difference—because that’s what God is **calling** you do to.

-There will be **leaders** in that passion, that cause that make your heart beat fast when you hear them talk about it. You think, “That’s what **I** want to see happen! That’s what **I** want to be a part of! That’s what **I** feel called to!” So—pursue it! Dream!

Look for opportunities. Just be careful that your passion doesn’t turn to superiority, judgment and division!

- B. Again, Paul’s magnanimous statement to all people at all times—and to us, the people of Jesus in 2007, is, “You know all these leaders and heroes that have lived with distinction and made such an incredible difference? You don’t have to choose sides. You don’t have to choose **one** hero—one little trickling stream to wash your feet in. Jump in the river of heroes! **ALL OF THEM BELONG TO ALL OF YOU!** And **ALL** of you belong to **Christ**. And **Christ** belongs to **God**.”

-He says, “All these leaders have a different purpose in the church. **You may not know what it is—and so you’ll have to trust me sometimes—especially if you don’t agree with them!** Leaders haven’t been sent to create personality cults—but to make a difference in God’s church—for His sake. They’re just a bunch of migrant workers in

God's field!" And you, the **CHURCH**—you—we—together—are the hands, feet, arms, eyes, ears—body of Jesus in this world. This plan is absolutely magnificent! **But for it to work, there has to be unity.** Say that with me: ***For God's plan to work, there needs to be UNITY!***

1. Now. Here's the question: How in the **world** would you ever bring all these vastly different ideologies and concepts and movements that have existed together? Do we try to just mash everything together, see what happens?
 -No. Unity is God's job, not ours! He's given us unity by giving **One Spirit!** We don't **create** the unity. But we **are** called to **preserve** it. See, God loves unity in **diversity.**
 But **He's** the only one who can pull something that vast off. So. He changes our attitudes. Paul, in another passage, says it like this:
Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all (Ephesians 4:2-6 NLT).
2. Know how I know some of this stuff about divisiveness? About how passion turns on team members? Because I've been on both sides of this stuff. I can't begin to **tell** you how many people, down through the years, have handed me a book or a tape or a video from their favorite church or speaker or hero; "Now **this** guy can **really** speak!" And, of course, I get it. "Why can't we be more like **them?** Or, why can't **you** be more like **him?**"

 -But it gets much more personal than that. I haven't just **seen** division and jealousy; I've **created** it. **I've** been the one who's been guilty of turning my passion on others. You know, people on the same team. I've looked down on others—and instead of understanding them and listening to them—judged them. And I'm not proud of that at all. The result of that kind of stuff is always damaging. Hopefully, I've learned my lesson. Because, see, Paul says that stuff is for **babies!**
 Paul says, "When you do that, you're acting like you don't even **have** the spirit of God living in you!"
3. I think Paul's advice about **preserving** unity is absolutely critical. He says, "Be patient with other people and their hang-ups. You know, their weirdnesses. Only **love** will help you do that. He said, "Be humble!" Boy, **that's** important, isn't it. And be gentle. You don't have to play Holy Spirit. Someone already **has** that job. Guess **Who?** Give Him space. **Chill!** You don't have to kick down the barriers. **Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace (Ephesians 4:3 NLT).**
 -I think patience, humility and gentleness is needed at another level. When we're passionate about seeing something happen—we want **action!** Our immediate thought is, "Maybe I need to move close to where the action **really** is!" And I think God would say, "Why don't you bloom where you're planted! Luther stayed in

Germany. Wesley stayed in England. Hybels stayed in South Barrington. Rob Bell stayed in Grand Rapids! Imagine that!

-I value the process of bringing about what I'm doing in **you! Look** at Me! I'm right here—not just over there! I've placed you **precisely** where you are for a reason. So, just be **there**. Be **all** there! And watch what I do!"

IV. CLOSING

A. Years ago, in a previous life, I was a youth pastor! We had just finished a day of service, cleaning up elderly people's yards, and were back at the church eating and goofing off. That included putting ice down each others backs.

So, I was chasing this kid, Scott Montgomery, with a handful of ice. He went through an orange door and instinctively closed it, not realizing that I was hot on his trail! I hit the edge of that door at full tilt, instinctively turning my head. In the daze of unconsciousness, I heard the kids saying, "Ooooo! Look at his ear!"

-When I got to the ER, the plastic surgeon said, "**Oh my gosh! It's completely bifurcated!**" Which means—cut in half. I learned that day—35 stitches later--I love my body, and I don't want to see **any** part of it get **bifurcated!**

B. And Jesus **loves His** Body--His Church! And He doesn't want any of it hurt—or bifurcated! It's called **unity**. And whatever our passion is, whoever our favorite leader is—we are called to **preserve the unity!**