

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

**September 30, 2007**

**MAKE IT ALL ABOUT YOU!**

**1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16**

**I. INTRO**

- A. When it comes to the Bible, God and Spirituality, kids can *really* get things confused, can't they! Aren't you glad that adults get it straight—you know, have all the corners nailed down and figured out?
1. Truth is—the spiritual arena of life has been perhaps the single most confusing one for the people in our world. It cuts deep into our hearts. Sometimes it brings out the best. Sometimes it brings out the worst.  
-For example, there are a *lot* of people who actually *know* the story of Jesus death and resurrection, and may even belong to a Christian church--but don't *get* the significance of it. Why?
  2. To top it off, there are sincere, thinking good people who have no ulterior motives, no ax to grind—who think Jesus was an amazing person--but can't begin to understand why anyone would waste their life living for Him, talking to Him, or depending on him.
- B. Paul, early Christian leader and author of this letter we're studying ran into this exact problem. Following Jesus had cost him significantly. He was a *very* brilliant man and had a great reputation among all those who knew him. One day he made a decision to follow Jesus. When he made that decision, he in essence torched his resume—and it cost him his friends, his income—and ultimately his life.  
-In this letter, he says that the death, resurrection and teaching of Jesus has cut a swath through this world that only seems to get wider. Listen to how he explains it:  
**The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. As the Scriptures say, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent."**  
**So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense. But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength. Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God (1 Corinthians 1:18-29 NLT).**

What Paul is saying under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is that God's wisdom, God's unusual plan for saving humanity can be boiled down to a cross—where the Jesus Christ, died a shameful, horrible death for the sins of the world and rose to life three days later. -Most people in our world see the cross as a religious symbol; many hang them around their necks—or in their homes. But Paul says—and the Bible teaches—that **without** the cross, there **is** no true spirituality-- and there **is** no real wisdom that transcends life. -In a culture that **thrives** on tolerance—brags about it, **that** sounds pretty stark and divisive, doesn't it? And that's what we're going to talk about this morning. So...do you want to go on? This talk—this concept—might spoil your day and make you mad! But it might make things **very** clear, too.

## II. TWO OPPOSITE PERSPECTIVES

- A. I think it's fair to say that we live in a world that almost **totally** focuses on symptoms. It doesn't take a genius to see that our world is damaged. A brief tour through the weekend paper will give story after story about how it's being damaged by war, by hatred, by ignorance, by disease, by poverty, by the abuse of its resources--its land, wildlife, water, and air.
1. Most people in our world system understand that these issues need to somehow be addressed. And **most** think that if we could eliminate the symptoms—the things that threaten us, frustrate us, hurt us, embarrass us, we would solve our problems. But when Jesus came, He taught that the core problem is **way** deeper—and way **older** than the symptoms.
    - Jesus taught that the ultimate problem is in the heart of all places. Not the pump—the core of who we are. Our hearts don't just need a few nips and tucks, a little bit of self-help education to change. Our hearts need to be **transformed!**
  2. Whenever the Bible talks about the **cross**, like Paul does here, it's talking about God's whole intervention in the life of this planet through His Son, Jesus Christ. The whole plan. How Jesus lived; what He taught about reality---and how we should live. And, of course, the cross stands for how his death and resurrection made a way for all darkness to be defeated; for how life and hope and healing can come to every corner of the planet.
    - The change agent in all this is the Holy Spirit—who comes to live at the core of people who trust the in the way of the cross. The Spirit transforms us inside and out. He doesn't just clean us up, He transforms the way we think, the way we see life, the way we hear God's voice. And He gives us power to live as Jesus did—and love as Jesus did—and be a self-giving influence wherever we find ourselves.
    - This transformation of our minds by the Spirit is why this passage says that those who have experienced the power of the cross see it as the power and wisdom of God—right in the face of some of the world's brightest who would say that it's for morons.
  3. In that day—and over the centuries—the general response to the cross—God's means of rescuing **all** humanity—and setting the world right—has not been good. In that culture, both Jews and Greeks saw the story of Jesus death on a cross for sin as stupid. Unintelligent. Scandalous, even.
    - And today, people are just as likely to say either, "That's good. I'm glad it works for you." Or "**No way! Human beings aren't a bunch of helpless sinners who need changed! Some people might need a crutch like that, but not me!**"
    - Why? Well, it's pride would be one explanation. But at the core it seems like such

a powerless, shameful way for Jesus—if in fact He was God—to die. It seems so—**un-godlike!**

-And so, there are some who **get it**—who are profoundly moved that God would love them enough to make a way—and lay their lives on the line. And there are people who **don't**. Who say, “I’m sorry—but it sounds too far out for me to believe!”

4. The world systems alternative to the **cross**, of course, are the different varieties of wisdom we’ve come up with; education, politics, science, psychology, medicine or environmentalism. This wisdom **does** offer some **great**, creative ideas for making the world a better place. What they **lack** is the power to change people at the core; change their love quotient, their value system. Turn their hearts others—and away from self-absorption, greed and self-interest. They point to the **symptoms**; the **cross** points **directly** to the source of the problems—**sin**; and the solution; a **Savior**.

- B. Now. Here’s the problem the people in Corinth faced—and that Paul is trying to get at. They believed in Jesus and his cross to save them from their sins—and then turned to their culture with it’s philosophers and scholars for wisdom in how to live, what to value and how to be respected and admired.

-And **that’s** why Paul doesn’t mess around. He says, **The cross has been driven like a stake through the planet—dividing history and people into two basic groups: people who get it and shape their lives around it as the power of God—and those who think it’s foolishness!**

-And Paul asks a question that is quite sarcastic. So...if the cross is God’s wisdom, God’s solution—where does that leave the philosophers, the really smart people, the educators, the politicians and the great debaters of our world? And how are **they** doing at dealing the core problems of life on this planet without God’s help?”

1. How would we answer that? Well, there’s more money, more technology, better roads, better health systems, better nutrition, more conveniences—for a **few** people. But how about the **world**? What would **you** say? How are things going? Are we less prone to shed blood to solve problems? Have we been able to educate people out of problems like crime and sexually transmitted diseases? Is there less alcoholism, less depression, less anger and hatred?
2. Strange thing is, not only do the smart, talented, gifted people who seem to have everything find it impossible to solve these problems--they fall into the same traps as everyone else. Think of the celebrities our world follows, quotes and photographs—just in terms of the recent headlines: Michael Vick; OJ Simpson; Conrad Black; Owen Wilson—to say nothing of the sillier examples—Paris Hilton, Britney Spears, and Lindsey Lohan. They seem to have what everyone is trying to get; how’s it working for them?
3. Paul just lays it out. There are two **very** different operating systems in this world. One is promoted and quoted in most universities, government buildings, corporate offices—published in books and magazines, sold over the TV and internet. It’s based on the best in intelligence, money, talent and education. The other is based on an ancient man, reputed to have died and come back to life—and **somehow** split history into two big pieces.

-Think about operating systems and computers. -Paul says that there are two basic operating systems—and they’re very different. The **Spirit** is the One who makes the difference

4. What you find is that there are two **very** different operating systems for setting the world right—and setting us right. When I started into computers, I started on Word Perfect 4.2. It was a **DOS** based system. Anyone remember this? I have **no** idea what DOS stands for. I just know that you work it through typing in codes and using the F keys. When Windows came along—I resisted. See, even though I knew it was better--I was **used** to the old system. I've since converted. I **had** to! My computer won't take the floppy disks any more!
- That, friends, is at the heart of what Paul is saying here. The **cross**—following Jesus changes **everything**. God's way of setting the world right through the cross blows all the categories. It won't **work** on your computer. You can't just Frankenstein it into your existing system.
  - The world system is based on the few—you know, the lucky, the rich, the well-educated, the well-known, the beautiful, talented people. But God, through the cross, has leveled the playing field. In fact, He purposely chooses the weak, the foolish, those who never get noticed—so that **everyone** knows he's behind it.
  - The world system is, at the core, about self—and self-advancement. Not the cross. The cross is about **God's** plan to set the world right—about the coming of and advancement of **His** Kingdom—not mine. It helps us, heals us and changes us—but it's not a new self-help course we can add to our collection.
  - And, of course, the source of power is totally, awesomely different. If you want to do the world's system—you have to do it based on **your** abilities, **your** looks, **your** talent and charisma. God's plan runs on His power—and it **never** runs out of power.
  - Paul puts this in extremely moving, but counter-cultural words. ...**God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God (1 Corinthians 1:27-29 NLT).**
5. And the payoff—the end result of the two systems is way different too. Is there a payoff in the world system? Of course there is. But you'd better grab it while you can, cause it doesn't last—and it dies with **you**. **He who dies with the most toys wins.**
- In God's operating system—the result is the transformation of my life—and the lives of others—for all eternity. This passage comparing these **vastly different** and sometimes contradictory operating systems says this:  
**God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:30-31 NLT)."**
  - a. Here's the deal. A person can totally and freely choose to live by the world's operating system. Just so you understand that it's like the game of Monopoly. You can win if you play the game right; you can get all the property, all the money, the prestige of putting hotels on Boardwalk—and bankrupting your competitors. But...when the game is over, it **all goes back in the box!** Actually, you go out in a box, too.
  - b. God's wisdom says, "Better look at the cross. Better figure out what matters, where the power and wisdom **really** is—and where you will have

your best shot at making the difference you were **created** to make, and seeing the shalom of God come to your heart and to this world—in **this** life...and the next.

-The cross is **God's** plan—founded in the eternity and wisdom of God. To ignore it—is to ignore God Himself.

\*He **alone** makes us right with God—the One everybody has to face.

\*He makes us pure and holy/excellent. In other words, Christ is the **only One** who can transform us into the person's we want to be.

\*And He **alone** has the power to free us—and the world we live in—from the grip of all sin—greed, injustice, poverty, misery, squalor, and shame.

And **we** can experience this power—but **only** at the cross. .

### III. THE CROSS IS ABOUT MAKING THE WORLD RIGHT

A. You may be thinking, “Hey Ken! I **believe** in the cross of Jesus! I **believe** He died in my place! I **get** it!” As followers of Christ—those who **get** it--in North America, I think we have tended to make two of the same mistakes the people in this church did.

1. The first is to trust God's operating system through the cross to transform our lives and help us to find the forgiveness and grace God offers. And **then** to conform to what our culture has to say about a successful life—university educated kids, a comfortable home, a nice little nest egg for the future, well thought of by our neighbors.

-The trouble is—those aren't **bad** things—they just aren't what the cross is all about. Life is like this stew where Jesus is just another ingredient to make it “taste” right. Jesus—His forgiveness and grace and hope and peace becomes a self-help program for a **better** life—not the **point** of life. Jesus never asked to be another ingredient. He asked to be the Lord of people who would unswervingly follow His leadership. Who would choose love when they felt like hating—who would **take on** the world system based on money, power, success, talent, education and beauty—not **bow** to it.

-To see Jesus as **THE** Wisdom, **THE** Power of God—to see Jesus as **THE** Way—not **A** way, **THE** Truth—not **A** Truth, and **THE** Life—not **A** life. Jesus wasn't just amazing and brilliant. Jesus was right—about **everything**. He didn't come to present another religious view of life—He came to tell us about reality. We weren't getting it. We thought pleasing God was about doing religious stuff, following laws and rules. He came to tell us how life in this world works so we could cooperate with God—and **be a significant part of God making things right here**. Bringing **His Kingdom, His leadership, His will** here in our lives—in all life—everywhere and in everything sin has wrecked.

-Here's the bottom line. Jesus will forgive our sin and pride and destructive, unloving impatient behavior. He will make His home in us through His Spirit—so that we have this **on-board spiritual mechanic** working in us all the time. He's promised peace in life's storms—wisdom when we're confused—and heal when we're broken. He will provide for all our needs—as we bring all our resources under **His** leadership. **But He will not devote Himself to being a part of our self-advancement!**

-Remember the cross? The cross, friends, was **not** about Jesus self-advancement; it was about His **self-giving**; His humiliation at our hands to accomplish the purposes of God in our lives. His life wasn't **taken**, it was willingly and lovingly given.

2. Something else—and this was one of the more drastic detours the Corinthians had taken. They **started** with the cross of Jesus. But they got sucked into the pseudo-spirituality of their culture. You could describe it like this: “Okay. God the confess my sins thing is done. Doing the Bible-reading/listening thing going (they didn’t have personal copies of the OT). Doing the **praying** thing. There **has** to be more! There must be some **secret** knowledge and wisdom—a deeper spirituality than just the cross.”
- You’ll find that Paul uses the words **wisdom, knowledge and spirituality** a lot in this letter. Paul says, “Nope! Jesus Christ—the cross **is** God’s wisdom! Knowledge? Knowledge by itself just makes you arrogant—unusable to God. Secrets? Well, the **biggest** secret is the one He made known through us—that He is **making the world right—through the cross!** There are not upper and lower levels of spirituality—just people with the Spirit in them who get the cross and begin to understand more and more—the **power** of it and the **beauty** of it. Th-th-that’s all folks!”
- a. Know what the bottom line was for them—and for us? Spiritual status. They would take God’s mission in this world, through Christ and the cross—and use it like a chamois to buff up their own halo! Do you see the issue? It’s not so much, “How can I be totally in tune with what God is doing? How can I be more like Jesus and be a part of what He’s doing?” It was how can I be in Jesus’ inner circle? You know—not with a throne, but with a bigger, more comfortable chair than others. How can **my** voice stand out over the others?
- It’s using spirituality to make yourself better, more holy. “You may be a friend of Jesus—but I’m His **best** friend. You may know some of the secrets, but God and I?—we’re like this—really tight! And **He** tells me His secrets. In fact, He’s told me a few things about you—and how your life can be in better shape.
- b. We’re relentless! It’s like our egos are so weak and needy—we will use the humiliation of God’s Son to make ourselves better and get our own way! And when we do that—it becomes Jesus—oh, yes, and the cross--**PLUS!** Plus cool new insights and Greek words and status and secret teachings. And it’s about **US**, not Jesus or His mission.
3. Paul says, the **cross is not** the starting point. It **IS** the point. It’s not the doorway to deeper stuff; it is **way** deeper than you can possibly imagine. The cross is God’s solution to a wrecked world filled with wrecked people—who are traveling on a wrecked path—and don’t even **know** it! Who think that the next paycheck, the next report praising them for being wonderful parents or being wonderful employees—the next trophy, purchase, or talent show will do it? And it **won’t**. Finding out even more cool philosophical and deeper spiritual truths. It **is** the deeper philosophical truth. The wisdom of God in dealing with our sin.
4. The question is—if Jesus Christ is the wisdom and power of God, why would we ever devote ourselves to a system that has wrecked—and continues to wreck the world—and hurt more people than it helps?
- I think Paul is quite accurate when he says, “So. Where are all the really, **really** smart impressive people of this world. The scholars, the doctors, the prime ministers and presidents and heads of universities and athletes and movie stars and creators of nuclear technology? How have they helped with the mess our

world is in? Are the problems we're facing educational, political, medical or financial—or are they **heart** problems?

-Jesus said, "You have to choose which Kingdom you will pledge your allegiance to? You can't pledge your allegiance to Jesus—and then just have Him be an ingredient in your recipe for a more successful life. You can't choose Jesus' Kingdom—and make Him a part of your spiritual self advancement.

B. Just so we're clear, if you're a follower of Jesus—the cross **is** the point. It is the wisdom and power of God for setting us right—but also for setting the whole world with all of it's chaos and misery and injustice right. When we choose the world right—and for setting us right. We live at the center of it—reconciled, made right with God and with each other.

1. And the cross of Jesus is the example—the **power** behind how we live out our lives. Whether we live them pretty much for ourselves and our friends and our kids, if we have them—or whether we will follow Jesus **to** the cross. Remember what Jesus said, "Unless you take up **your** cross and follow me—you can't be my disciples."

-We don't **use** the cross to get Jesus and Heaven—and then live for ourselves. We are called as followers of Jesus to live **cross-shaped** lives—self-giving lives. We called to gather in a **cross shaped community**—the community of Jesus—called to give sacrificially of what we've been given. This will mean living **selflessly** in a self-centered, self-pre-occupied, self-advancing world. Paul **brilliantly** stated it like this in Phil. 2:

**Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion (Philippians 2:3-8 Msg).**

2. Let me summarize this. Through the weakness and shame of Jesus Christ dying on a cross, God has made a way for **all** people to come back to Him—and to be a part of his plan to right every wrong, bring justice to every injustice and **save** this planet and the people on it. It's **his** wisdom. But many people don't get it; and some never will.

-If we make the cross, our church, Jesus about shining up our own lives, making us more successful, wealthy, powerful and beautiful—we've in essence made the cross all about us. And when we make **anything** all about us, we kill it. What happens to a family when it's all about the parents? What happens to a government or company when it's all about the egos and advancement of it's leaders? Anyone here who would say, "Yeah, I'd like to marry someone whose life is all about **them?**" Jesus mission certain includes us and our well-being—but it's **so much more!** The cross—Christ's coming—is about Him dealing once and for all with sin and Satan and death. When we engage, we become a part of his plan to bring **foundness** to **lostness**--to right every wrong, bring every person back home, bring justice to every injustice and save the planet and the people on it.

3. So. We live in a world that doesn't **get** it. Where, for the most part, the cross is seen as foolishness; for losers. As a crutch for weak people. How can that change? Well, historically that's changed by God's sheer power being seen through the kind of people Paul describes here: **God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important (1 Cor.1:27-28 NLT).** Ordinary people—living cross-shaped lives.  
-People look, see what's happening, and think, "There's really no good explanation for that." People who get it, who understand the **cross**, think, "It's the power of the cross!"
4. I thought in closing this morning, I'd just lay out a handful of scenarios and ask, "Where does this power come from?" If you think it comes from the cross, say back to me, ***The power of the cross!***
- You get really, **really** hurt by someone. The old you would be filled with bitterness and revenge. But the **new** you forgives, lets go of the grudge and is filled, once again with peace—even though this person never changes. What could **possibly** explain that?
  - Another situation. A young black man, sees the horrendous injustices inflicted on his people in a nation that claims that all are created equal. He stands up to it—knowing that he will be persecuted, jailed, hated—and probably lose his life in the process. But he does it any way—makes an unbelievable difference—and is assassinated. What could **possibly** explain Martin Luther King, Jr.?
  - A young Romanian nun decides to go to help the poorest of the poor die with dignity—even though she may never be noticed or acknowledged. But she is noticed—and thousands of people join her; and hundreds of thousands are inspired by her. But fame and awards **never** change her servant heart. What could possibly explain a Mother Theresa?
  - A young movement starts up in the most powerful nation on the planet. They are hated, brutalized, penalized and shoved to the bottom. But their love is relentless and profound in the face of hatred. And they can't be stopped. They are found on the front lines of love and care and compassion—ultimately world wide. What could **possibly** explain the **Followers of The Way?**

#### IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- A. One final story. Last Sunday, John Deacon read the report of Branch Out—listing the large number of organizations we support. One is the **Philip Aziz Centre**—devoted to lovingly providing care to people dying of AIDS.  
-My wife, Lori, thought to herself. "That's funny—that's the name of the main art teacher I studied under for 4 years in a specialized program. But it couldn't be—he was an atheist. The reason he stood out in particular was that he occasionally heckled her for her faith. It reached a crescendo when she won the art scholarship for the school—and then turned it down, saying she was going to Bible college instead.  
-When Mr. Aziz found out about that, he humiliated her in front of the class—saying, in essence, that she was throwing her life away.  
-We did some investigation—and found out that Philip Aziz was an artist and art teacher who taught locally—probably the same teacher she had. When he contracted AIDS, he

was rejected by his family—and wandered into the **Church In The City**—where the Pastor and congregation reached out to him, loved him, embraced him until he died of AIDS in 1991. He put His faith in Jesus Christ—and donates his entire estate to help others. On his deathbed, he said: **“I know now, I have the love of my Creator.”** What could *possibly* explain that?

- B. If we will live cross-shaped, self-giving lives—part of all God is doing to break the back of sin and set the world right—the *power* of the cross will make sense in a world that doesn't get it.