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## REWARDED BY JESUS

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### Part 7 of 1st Corinthians

Pastor Mark Driscoll | 1 Corinthians 3:9b-15 | February 19, 2006

A brush of idealism paints the 1st-century church as a nostalgic example of community and perfection. The congregation in Corinth, however, was anything but ideal. Rather than sharing their possessions, the Corinthians would sue each other to get more stuff. Rather than eating meals together, the Corinthians would cut in line during communion to get drunk off the wine. And rather than communal singing, the Corinthians had communal sex. I'm A.J. Hamilton with Mars Hill Church in Seattle. In this sermon series, Pastor Mark Driscoll teaches on the letter known as 1 Corinthians, which the Apostle Paul wrote to untangle the many moral and theological knots the Corinthian church created.

In addressing their sin, Paul provides some of the richest theological sections of the entire New Testament. After listening to the following sermon, e-mail any questions or comments to [feedback@marshillchurch.org](mailto:feedback@marshillchurch.org). To automatically receive Mars Hill audio programming, subscribe to our podcast available at [marshillchurch.org](http://marshillchurch.org). And now, here's Pastor Mark with "Rewarded By Jesus", the seventh sermon in a series, "Christians Gone Wild: 1 Corinthians."

Well, good morning, and welcome to Mars Hill. We are in 1 Corinthians 3 today – if you've got a Bible you can go there – beginning in verse 9. And I'll be honest with you – my son was up late. I've got the stomach flu. It's one of those days. So I had a really funny sermon, a lot of NASCAR jokes, and about 3:00 in the morning when I was still awake I junked it. We're gonna have one of those just heart-to-hearts today. My goal is to let you see the church from the perspective of me as your pastor, or one of the leaders here in the church, and hopefully to cause you to have an increased affection for this place and an increased devotion to help us do a better job.

And so I'll go ahead and pray, and I would make one note, too, that this service always fills up. The new people end up coming here. There are some other options if you're able to get up and go to the 8:30 there's a few seats there. They're nice people. They're morning people. They're in a great mood. They're all chipper. They're the caffeinated early risers. You'll love them. The 12:30 service has seats. They're pretty nice. They have a hard time getting up by noon, but they do, so you can join them. There's also two services at Mars Hill Shoreline, 9:45 and 11:45.

So if any of you are able to find another spot at least in the interim to leave a few seats here free for visitors, we sure would appreciate that. If this is the only service that works for you, that's fine too; we're glad to have you. So I'll go ahead and pray, and we'll just get right to work.

Father God, I thank you for Mars Hill Church. I thank you that this church and the people in this church were purchased by the Lord Jesus through his death, burial and resurrection. And Father, we want to do a good job being the church. We want to do a good job serving this city. And to do that, we need wisdom. We need the Holy Spirit. We need the foundation of Jesus. We need a good plan.

And we need your help, so we're asking for your help today, that you would instruct us as to the big picture of how we can be the church that you intend for us to be, and specifically what that means for each of us individually, and the part that you would have for us to play for that to happen. We ask that our time would be focused on Jesus; that the Holy Spirit would come to teach us and lead us and guide us and empower us and convict us, as we ask these things in Jesus' good name. Amen.

Well, as we get into it today we're gonna be talking a lot of church business, quite frankly. Some things that maybe many of you don't think are all that important because it's the inner workings and the nuts and bolts and the details of church life. But I think it's important that you see the church from the perspective of a pastor. I think that's what Paul is trying to do in 1 Corinthians. The people in the church don't have an accurate understanding of the whole church. They only see their part, and so he wants to give them a broader perspective. He wants them to see the church from his perspective so that they have the same heart and the same devotion to the church that he does.

And so as we talk about this, you're probably gonna find some of this boring unless you really love Mars Hill Church. And then it'll be important to you, because everything we do here is really built on trust. Can you trust your leaders? Can you trust the systems? Can you trust the policies, procedures, the budget? Is this a trustworthy place, and are we a trustworthy people? And the reason why this matters is that churches, for better or for worse, are architected in a certain way. Different churches put themselves together in different ways. And if they do a good job organizing themselves, then money is well-spent, and people are well-served, and things run efficiently, and new people meet Jesus, and people grow in their faith, and good things happen.

And if it's not a church that's architected well, what happens is just like a home that's not architected well, eventually it collapses and people get hurt. And this is really important business. I know some of you are here because you've come from churches that weren't well-architected and they fell apart. There were church splits, fights, immorality, bad use of money, and people got hurt. Some people spiritually just got destroyed. And this is important

because if a church is not well-architected – if it's not put together well – and things fall apart, the reputation of Jesus is really harmed. People think very lowly of Jesus. And also what happens is that people get hurt.

And because of our love for Jesus and our love for people, we want to do a good job being a trustworthy, well-architected, well-put-together church. And that's what Paul is talking about today. And he lays out six principles, and if Mars Hill is your home, I want to articulate these principles so that you feel comfortable and safe and trustworthy at this place. If Mars Hill is not your home and you're checking us out, I want you to know who we are. If God should call you to another church we would say, "Great – just look for these things so that you're putting yourself in the right place."

And so we're talking about us as a church today and some very important principles for how we do life together. The first is in chapter 3:9, and that's where Paul begins. "For we are God's fellow workers, and you are God's field, God's building." We looked at the metaphor of God's field last week, and this week we'll focus on that metaphor of God's building. And he says that the people in the church and the church itself belong to God. And this may seem obvious, but we have to start there.

Churches – even if they're in a denomination, they don't belong to the denomination. Churches, if they have a lot of pastors, don't belong to the pastors. Churches, if they have a lot of people, don't belong to the people. Churches that have some very generous donors that make most of the things happen are not controlled and owned and the possession of those donors. That ultimately Mars Hill Church, and ultimately us as a people, we each belong to God – to God. What that means, that God is the most important person in this church and in our lives; that our goal is to obey God and to honor God and to serve God and to worship God.

And it doesn't matter what the majority says, and it doesn't matter what the critics might say; that the real question is what does God want for us as a people? We obtain that by reading Scripture and praying and looking at history, because there are other faithful Christians that God has used, and we want to learn from their example. And ultimately it's seeking what God would have for us as a church, individually and collectively. So the first thing is Mars Hill doesn't belong to me, doesn't belong to the elders, doesn't belong to the deacons, it doesn't belong to the members, it doesn't belong to the majority. Ultimately, this church belongs to God. Ultimately it belongs to God alone, as do we individually as a people.

Beginning from that, he's established the question of ownership. Now he's going to refer to the church as a building, and then it comes the question of architecture. And if you're an architect you know how important architecture is. If you live in a junky, dumpy, falling-apart place, you know how important an architect is. The architect of any building or organization is absolutely critical, okay, because if the architect doesn't do their job well, eventually organizations, relationships, companies, churches, whatever it might be that needed to be architected, collapses.

So Paul says that in verse 10, the first half: "By the grace God has given to me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder." And I was reading Paul's words on this, and it struck me that he said it as plainly as he did. He says this: "I'm a good architect. I know how to build churches – systems, policies, procedures – develop leaders, raise money, find buildings, do real estate, disseminate small groups. I know how to do that; I'm really good at that." And it sounds at first glance kind of arrogant, doesn't it? I mean I always have this reticence to tell you I know how to do my job, because then you'll think I'm arrogant. But if I tell you I don't know how to do my job, then you'll leave.

So it's really the horns of a terrible dilemma as a pastor. If you get up and say, "You can trust me. I know what I'm doing." "Oh, he's arrogant!" "You shouldn't trust me. I don't know what I'm doing." Well, then you leave. It's like those are hard options. The truth is that every church needs to have a leader, a senior leader, a first among equals, like Paul, who can architect a church. Okay, what this means is some of you come from smaller churches where the pastor works in the church, not on the church. So if you call, they answer the phone. If you drive by, they're mowing the lawn. They're making the photocopies for the bulletin, right? If you need something, you can just go to their house or call them or just get right to them, and they're available. They're working in the church.

What Paul is talking about is leaders in the church need to also work on the church. This is all of the things that most of you probably hate. Systems, policies, procedures – actually being aware that there are state laws, and we need to abide by them so we don't end up doing prison ministry from the inside, right – and being aware of these things. And this is the not sexy, not cool, not fun, laborious, really hard part of ministry. Singing like Tim, that would be cool. Teaching, leading, that's cool. You know, charts and graphs and by-laws and sub-points and legalities and technicalities and indemnification insurance – most of you are like "Uh! Them is big words!" I know.

I know; them is big words. And they're scary words, like litigation and jail time, right? Those are big, scary words. So we need to pay attention to those words. So let me tell you, you know, if you're used to a smaller church I mean I still get it. People will call the office – they're like, you know, and they want to talk to me right away. "What's Mark doing? I'd like to buy him coffee." It's like, "He's having a nervous breakdown right now. He's busy." And what happens is, if you're used to being in a smaller church you're used to thinking that one person is always available to everyone, and in a larger church that's just not possible.

And if you e-mail or you call and I don't get back to you, it doesn't mean that I don't love you. It just means that you were number 300 on the list that day – that day. And my job is not just to work in the church, but primarily to work on the church. And here's what I'm thinking about lately, and this is why I'm having a hard time sleeping. And I'll be honest with you – this is where we're at as a church. Questions like how are we going to get to 50 elders or pastors? Right now we have 15. If I need 50, how will we assess them and their families by the Biblical criteria? Train them, install them, appoint them?

And then as we grow as a church – because now we're seven services in two locations, looking at actually increasing to more locations – how will we have pastors in all of these different areas, but still connected, still unified, still accountable? Worse still, how will we have a meeting, right, and vote?

Like death by committee – 50 people in a meeting is no fun at all. And how will we come to conclusions? And what things should we vote on and not vote on? And what things should be delegated to teams and kept? The result of this kind of obsessive-compulsive disorder thinking that I suffer from led to the last six months rewriting the by-laws with the elders.

How many of you just, you're saying, "Lord Jesus, please let me be involved in the by-laws. I feel so passionate about the by-laws," right? None of you – it's two dozen pages of details that we're legally bound by on how we operate as a church. But it's so important, because that's architecting, right? That's architecting; that's coming up with a design so this can be a healthy, safe, growing church. To me, it's thinking about real estate. As we've outgrown this room, what will we do for additional real estate? When will we get our permits for that other building? How will we raise the rest of our money?

What about the other real estate opportunities? And how many seats will we need? And how much dollars will we need? And how much time will it take? And how many offices do we need? And technologically, how will we connect together all these various sites and maintain communication with a distributed system? All of these things – all of these kinds of things. Theologically, how will we maintain integrity in what is now over a hundred – and I pray becomes hundreds – of community groups, Bible study, meals, social connecting points scattered all over the Puget Sound?

How will we make sure that we don't have felons leading those groups, and people that are stalkers and crazy? You know, people that are actually doctrinally sound and love Jesus and helpful? How will we make sure that the hundreds of children that pass through our children's ministry have teachers that are qualified and aren't registered sex offenders? All of these kind of things, that much of what I do lately is working on the church not working in the church – dealing with the media, writing books, writing curriculum, developing leadership, thinking through finances, systems, policies, procedures.

And what Paul says is, "I'm an expert builder." I don't think I'm an expert building, but by God's grace I sure hope to be. You know, and there's some major complications with a church like ours. We're not very affluent. Most of the churches in the state that are around our size have twice our budget. We're in one of the most expensive places – actually in the urban core of the city. Many of you are young and moving all the time, so it's a constant shift of people. We're growing at 60 to 70 percent a year. Parking is so difficult. Technology at this point is so expensive. All of these variables are incredibly complicated.

In addition, we're planting churches, and we have a network that we help support that has planted over a hundred churches in a few years across the country. This year may do another 50 or 60 – how do we relate to them, and serve them, and train the pastors there, and support them, and provide theological education as everything continues to explode exponentially? All of these complicated variables. What it takes is a plan, and I tell you this because when you come into Mars Hill you need to know that we care about these things. You need to know that we're thinking about these things, that we're working through these things, and that this is incredibly important because this year about a quarter million people will come to Mars Hill – about a quarter million people.

Over a million people will just download the sermon. You will give at least – at least \$5 million. And the question is: are we doing a good job with all that? Are we actually effectively able to care for that many people? Are we wisely spending that many dollars? Are we doing all we can to in advance think through all of the logistics to be as effective as we possibly can? Knowing that we're sinners and the church is an imperfect organization run by imperfect people like me. But Paul says that for churches to succeed they must have an architect who makes a good plan.

And I'm here to tell you that I do believe we are a church that takes this incredibly seriously. And I can assure you personally that this is on my mind, if anything, too much. I slept maybe an hour last night, because I'm puking with the flu, and my kid's sick, and I'm thinking about systems, policies, procedures, and by-laws. Because I want to be doing the best I can to serve this church and to make it as effective as it possibly can. Paul says this church belongs to God, and that an expert builder, a good architect, is needed if we're to do anything. And then he goes on at the end of verse 10 and says that "someone else is building on it," that someone else is exercising the plan, "But each should be careful how he builds."

So now he's getting to the construction crew that actually builds the church. You are the construction crew. There are deacons that help manage the crew, and you are the crew. And what he says is that we each need to be careful how we build, so I would ask you, you know, what are your skills, talents, abilities? What are your capacities? Why has God brought you to Seattle at this time? Why has he brought you to Mars Hill? What does he have for you to do? What is your contribution? You need to be careful how you build. What that means is you need to get to know us, and we need to get to know you, if you're not already connected.

We have a thing called the Gospel class. It will start again in April, and it is for us the beginning place. You come in, and we tell you what we believe and how we're organized. And if you don't like that, at least you know it. And if you do like that, then you jump on board, and we get to know you, and we plug you in – make sure you have good doctrine, good character. And then we find where you are to be using your gifts, whether that's in music or technology or teaching or service or hospitality – whatever your thing is, all the way from just serving all the way up to becoming a pastor and going out to plant your own church. We do the whole thing.

So he says you gotta be careful how you build. What I would say to you is be careful what church you commit to. Make sure you do your homework. Make sure you have trust. Make sure that you feel that it's put together in a wise way. And then when you do serve, serve wisely, serve well. What that means is that we all need to be first getting our plan from the Holy Spirit through prayer and Scripture. And what this means for me and the other pastors in the church is that we are just research freaks. At every point in the church where we are growing, I always go find a church that's ahead of us – a number of churches that are ahead of us, that are more mature, bigger, more effective. And I'll get on a plane and I'll go bug their pastor.

Read every book I can find. Read church history. Study everything. You know, and some of it is really important. Like when we were between 2 and

3,000 people I remember meeting with a number of pastors of churches that were larger than us and asking them, "Okay, we're going to 3,000. Only maybe 500 churches out of 425,000 in America are that size. I've never been there. We've never been there. What in the world awaits us?" And here's what they said, basically: "Death." That was their answer – death. I met one guy, he said, "You have two options at 3,000. You reorganize, and then everybody hates you, or you don't reorganize, and you die."

And then there was this long, awkward silence, and I said, "Isn't there a third option?" He's like, "Nope. Those are the two options." That doesn't sound good. "Do you want me to break your leg or your arm?" You're like, "Well, no. I would like a third option." He said, "Those are your options." He said, "Every guy I know, at 3,000 either the church split or he had a full-on nervous breakdown." He said, "Good luck." It was like, "How about you?" He said, "I had the nervous breakdown." Oh, ducky, you know? So I go meet with another guy. I said, "What happened about that size?" He said, "I was driving to church. Had a complete panic attack, nervous breakdown – called a suicide hotline, and never went to the church again."

I was like, "Okay. Well, thanks for sharing. I appreciate the tip." You know, I mean, what? You're on the way to church on Sunday, right? That's not encouraging. "Well, Pastor Mark couldn't be here today. He wants to kill himself. He'll see you in Heaven." You know, that's not encouraging. So I asked another guy. I said, "Well, what are my options?" He said, "I don't know. I had a nervous breakdown and I completely fell apart, and I didn't know it until it was too late." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I was at a movie theater, and I put my arm around a woman, and I snuggled with her, and at the end of the movie I realized it wasn't my wife."

I said, "Dude, you should've taken a day off, right – you weren't doing so good." And I was talking to a pastor friend of mine recently. He's a wonderful guy. He's got a great church. He loves Jesus. They're about the same point that we are. And he had come down, and he looked at me, and we're looking at each other. And he's like, "What do we do?" I was like, "Dude, we gotta figure it out." And he said, "Everybody I know is freaked out. They're all moral failures – adultery, nervous breakdown, took the money, hit the 'eject' button, freaked out." I said, "Yeah, I know." I said, "Well, we're not gonna do that. We're gonna love Jesus, and we're gonna do this." He said, "Okay."

I said, "Well, what do you think your biggest weakness is, you know? Adultery, stealing money – you know, what do you think your biggest thing is?" He says, "I don't know." I said, "I think mine is I'm just gonna wake up one day, put my underwear on over my pants, and be that guy who just loses it." So you know if I show up on a Sunday and my underwear's outside of my pants, somebody take me out to breakfast and tuck me in, right? Because I just have lost it; I just have lost it. And that happens sometimes. I mean, you know, some guys it's just the pressure gets to them and they're the underwear outside of the pants guy. Just, "Hi!" and you're like, "Dude, you need a day off!"

And this is what happens. The pressure is unbelievable, because I want to care for everybody in the church. I want to build the systems. Need to raise the money – young family, all the critics, all the pressure. Paul says, "I'm a master builder, and everybody is building in the church." What this means is we need to build carefully, like Paul says, and to do that we need a strategic research plan, okay? And I would tell you this: that we have continually had a strategic plan since the beginning of Mars Hill, and we always have one that is far into the future with major details. I have massive obsessive-compulsive disorder. I'm a neatnik. I'm a freak. I like things organized, tidy.

Everything has to be lined up. I like charts. I like graphs. I like budgets. I like plans. I like back-up plans. I like back-up back-up plans, right? And I want you to know that, because you come here and you probably say, "Well, he's a young pastor. You know, is this thing held together, or is this just all gonna fall apart?" I know some of you have been in churches that got off to a pretty good start and then collapsed; that there really wasn't a plan. It's like buying a new house. You move in, you think, "Well, it looks pretty good." Then you realize the architect didn't do a good plan. The builder didn't use good supplies. The workers didn't do a good job. And pretty soon everything starts breaking down and it's a condemned building.

Some of you are here from those kind of churches. And I just want you to feel safe here. I want you to feel like you can trust us, and I want you to know that we take these things incredibly seriously. But I also want you to be in prayer, because the truth is it's just a lot of responsibility. I'm not gonna lie to you. I'm not gonna lie to you. I got five little kids. I got a hundred churches in our network. This thing's crazy out of control. Seven services in two locations – it's just a lot to engineer, particularly as it continues to grow.

And it concerned me this week. There's one guy that I really love, really respect. He took a church to 10,000. Godly guy – loves Jesus, reads through the Bible every year, eats a lot of bran, runs – I mean the guy's amazing. And I was talking to this other pastor buddy of mine, and we keep referring to this guy like, "Well, he's still doing good you know. He's still got his pants in his underwear, and he's with his wife, and the big things seem to be holding together." And I said, "That guy's like an inspiration for us." He says, "No. He just had a complete nervous breakdown and fell apart, and they're doing a conference on how he's dealing with his emotional meltdown." I was like, "No!"

He's like, "You want to go?" I was like, "No, I don't want to go. I'm already depressed." And so I would just ask you to be gracious with us as a church as we plan. I would ask you as you become members and connect and serve to build wisely. And I would ask you to be in prayer for us that we would effectively architect this church so it doesn't end up hurting you, and it doesn't end up hurting the leaders either. And that takes a lot of wisdom and a lot of foresight and a lot of planning, but that's what we're committed to. And I do believe that that is indeed how we're functioning.

He then goes forward in verse 11 and talks from the owner of the building to the architect of the building to the foundation of the building. "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." And here's what he's saying: at the bottom of everything has to be Jesus. You can have a nice kids' ministry, a nice singles' ministry, a nice high school, junior high, small groups, women's, men's, retreats, conference – you can have all kinds of great things. But they all need to be built on Jesus Christ. That apart from that, they'll fall apart. Apart from that, eventually it'll go sideways.

A church can't be built on a personality. It can't be built on a tradition. It can't be built on anything other than Jesus Christ. And I know this seems

obvious, but the sad truth is, it is not common. There are churches that are just built on Jesus, but there are other churches that are built on style, or personality, or musical preference, or small groups, or programming. I was talking to a friend of mine, and he's a pastor. He's going out to plant a church. He's a great guy. And he said there was a very successful church in his area. He was in with a few hundred other pastors for training a few weeks ago.

And so he went to visit this very successful church, honestly wanting to just see how they do things so he could learn how to be a better architect and build a better church. And he said what broke his heart is through the whole service – the singing, the service, the altar call, the offering – the name of Jesus was never spoken once; not once. A whole church, you know, and the church is the Bride of Christ. I couldn't imagine if my wife never said my name. You know, for Jesus to say, "There's my bride" – the bride never says the name of the groom. Tragic!

He said this pastor preached a whole sermon; at the end, said, "If you would like to go to Heaven and have all your sins forgiven, here's what you do," and he never said "Jesus." What? Let me just make this as plain as I can: Jesus is our God. He came down as a human being. He lived a life without sin in our place. He died as a substitute in our place for our sins. Three days later he rose. He's now ascended in Heaven. We worship him. We pray to him. We follow him. The Bible is about Jesus. Our life is about Jesus. Our church is about Jesus.

And we have lots of ministries – we have small groups, but the small groups are about Jesus. We have a premarital process, but the premarital processes connect couples to Jesus. We have a marital training, but that's to allow couples to worship, love, serve, obey Jesus. We have a kids' ministry; the whole point is that the kids would meet and love and know and follow and serve Jesus. I mean the bottom line for everything truly is Jesus. And there may be some things we get wrong, and I'm consciously aware of my own failures, faults, flaws, shortcomings, the problems in this church, the areas needing maturity. But boy, this is the most important thing of all – that everything is about Jesus, and everything is built on Jesus.

And if not, what will happen eventually? Just like moving into a new house that's been poorly constructed. It may be okay for a while, but eventually the roof caves in, people get hurt, some people get killed, and it's just a bloody mess. Paul says the church – Mars Hill – belongs to Jesus. My job, along with the elders, is to be a good architect, and that you are to serve faithfully, carefully, and that everything we build is on Jesus. And then he moves from that to talk about different materials used. He begins in verse 12: "If any man builds on this foundation" – of Jesus – "using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light.

"It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality" – he says – "of each man's work." Get a sip of water; throat is dying. But what he's talking about here is materials, okay? How many of you have lived in a place that was not built with good materials? How many of you are right now? Cutting-edge balsa wood framing; aluminum foil siding; you know, you're like, "What a heap this is!" You can tell when something has been built with good materials, quality materials. It lasts. It endures. It holds up. You can tell when something has just been thrown together. The materials are not good. The workmanship is not good.

And maybe the house goes up, or the building goes up, but it's not gonna be there for a long time. What Paul is saying is that churches need to be built with good materials – and I'm not talking just about the physical building, though that's part of it. What I'm talking about is the systems, the policies, the procedures, the programs, the leadership development, the accountability, the discipline of sin, the protection of people from stalkers and sex offenders who want to come in and do evil, or false teachers who have all kinds of crazy ideas.

That the church is architected in such a way that there are good things in place to make the church healthy, solid, and enduring – okay, I'll give you some of the things that I see are shoddy materials and workmanship that go into churches. The first thing I'll tell you is that the greatest liability at Mars Hill is me. I'll just tell you that. Now, you all know that, but I'll just agree with you. If anyone's gonna screw it up, I am suspect number one. Amen? Okay? So pray for me. And I know that; I know that. And it's a lot of pressure, but it's good, because I accept the fact that guys like me are the ones who ruin churches that are built by faithful people who serve and give faithfully.

I see it all the time. I see it all the time; even in churches that have absolutely fallen apart, there are often some good people there that are serving and giving. And a guy like me ruins it for everybody. I accept that. I'll tell you how guys like me ruin it: sexual sin. Some of you have been in churches where the pastor was a pervert doing things he shouldn't have been doing. I recently got a call from a church – for some reason, when churches fall apart, I seem to get a lot of the calls, which I didn't sign up for that ministry. It's not on my business card, that's not my job. I'm not into that. But they call.

"Our pastor had an adulterous relationship; ran off, got a girlfriend, disappeared" – whatever. "What do we do?" Oh, you're kidding! I have been in on literally dozens of these situations. Each one is just painful and heartbreaking. I got one recently. The church is going pretty good. They know that the pastor has a wife and like five or six girlfriends in the church. They called. They said, "We have a problem." I said, "Well, this guy cannot preach. He cannot be the pastor. He can't be – you can't have this guy be the architect. That's like having a drunk architect – don't live in that house! This guy is just not thinking straight. He is not qualified."

And they said, "Well, there's nothing we can do. He's in charge." See, that's the first problem. The first problem is when the church belongs to a guy like me, and not to God. And when a guy like me does something deplorable and nobody else has any authority to do anything. We have real elders who discipline me. I'm one man, one vote. I get out-voted. I got out-voted last week again – I mean it's a bummer for me. I was like, "I want this," and like, "Nah." "All right. I just thought I'd ask." I don't have any line-item veto. I can't hire, I can't fire by myself. I can't set the budget. I can't touch the money.

I mean we have intentionally built a system of mutually accountable leaders, so if I do end up coming to the office with my underwear outside my pants or with my girlfriends or something, you know, that somebody can put a bullet in my head and get rid of me, because that's exactly what should

happen. And that is in place. There is accountability. There is submission. We do have good leaders. I do love them. I'm not perfect, but you need to know that I take this incredibly seriously. I mean how tragic would it be if I were the guy to ruin everything that we've worked so hard for? I have no intention of being that guy, and by God's grace, I'm not that guy.

But churches that don't plan, or don't even have a mechanism by which to protect themselves, they're just so vulnerable; so vulnerable. Other guys, it's greed. Guys in my position, it's greed. Because I tell you what, when you get to a certain point like this, you can command pretty good money. Churches call with signing bonuses, like an athlete. "We'll give you a \$250,000.00 signing bonus, plus your salary, moving expenses." Nice – you're thinking, "Oh, look at that – 250 grand. I could get an Escalade with the rims. I could – that would be great!" But the truth is that guys who are only in it for the money, they'll start a church and then they leave. I'm not that guy.

Honestly, the elders pay me a fair wage. My wife and I are fine. We're content. We're not mistreated. We're not overpaid. I think it's fair, and we're happy here, we're content here. I talked to a guy recently who his church was going really, really well, and he left because he got a better offer. And I just thought, "That's like – man, if you really love your people, and it feels like a family, and you have the heart of a father, just because you get a better offer doesn't mean you leave the family." You're there for reasons other than just the check.

And so, you know, I understand where guys like me really jack it up. They just start expensing money for things that they shouldn't, and having sex with people they're not married to. And they're making bad decisions, and nobody can correct them. And they're leading in a bad direction, and nobody can stop them. I know that these are the junky, shoddy materials, and the systems and concepts that lead to the downfall and destruction of the church, and so much of it is tied to me. I need you to know this. I feel this way, to be honest with you, probably more than I should. There are nights I really have a hard time sleeping.

There are days that I really feel this weight, because what we're doing, I believe, is so important, and I believe that with the people that are serving and giving, and they are being faithful, and they are trusting, and they are sacrificing, that I want to be accountable. I want to architect a good church. I want to have real elders who hold everybody accountable. I want to really practice church discipline. I want to have real deacons that are morally, Biblically qualified. I want to have real church members that have sound doctrine and character, and are serving and giving and participating, and that it's all about Jesus. This is really my heart's desire at the deepest level.

And I know, too, where some churches go wrong on all of this is just that when they get to a point where we're at, it's just so easy to get lazy and comfortable and to say, "You know what, we got money. We got people. We're doing good. Why consider our flaws? Why consider the downside? Why think worst-case scenario?" We have to. All the way to this – and if you're giving to Mars Hill, you should have at some point asked this question: what if Mark gets hit by a car? I hope you don't do that like in a happy way, but like in a "what if" way, right?

And I talked to somebody recently – they're very generous – and they said, "I was at the last church, and I was giving a lot of money. And then something bad happened, and they didn't have a plan. If I'm gonna contribute here, do you have a plan?" Fair question; fair question, yeah. Okay, first thing is, there's now a \$5 million life insurance policy against me. I get hit by a car, you get 5 million bucks, okay? Now, don't hit me – but that's what you get, right? You get 5 million bucks, because I know that if something were to happen to me – I mean I hope there would be a season of mourning – you know I hope. "Ding, dong, the witch is dead – free cake for everybody!"

I hope somebody's sad, you know. But if I get hit by a car, there's gonna be a season of mourning and readjustment. So 5 million bucks will buy – I mean that's a one-year budget. That buys a little time. And the elders – there is a plan for the elders to cover the pulpit. And then there is somebody that I think would be the best person to take my place. And I met with him recently and told him that. I said, "In case of emergency, break glass. You're the guy in the glass. That's you." And I said, "So you're gonna get a call to be the teacher at Mars Hill – preaching pastor." And I said, "Now, what do you think about that?" He said, "Don't get hit by a car." That was his answer. So we're still negotiating the details.

But yeah, there is actually a plan in place. There is a plan in place. Now, I don't like that. I'm 35 – you're like, "What if I die? No, I'm not gonna die!" I mean I buckle up, look both ways when I cross the street. I'll be fine. I don't want to die. I don't plan on dying. But if I die, Mars Hill shouldn't die, because the foundation is Jesus and there's still a lot of good people, and there's still a lot of work to do. And so I just need you to know that if you give your money here, if you give your time, your talent, your treasure, your life, your family, your friends here. If you bring them to this church, if they do participate, if they do become Christians and members and get connected, that it is more than just a decent-looking room, a pretty cool band, and a few NASCAR jokes.

There really is a Biblically-established form of government and strategic plan to architect a healthy church to continue to grow. And in my heart I need to tell you that. I know some of you have that question, and I think you should. If you truly love this church you have to ask those questions. I love this church, so I have to ask these questions. Now, I hope to be here for 70 or 80 more years, right? I plan on being the old guy with no hair, no teeth, and still yelling. That's my goal. I want to be here my whole life – but what if? And I think where Paul says that sometimes the plan is just not good, and the materials are not good, and eventually the roof caves in – I think these are the kind of things for us, practically, that he's talking about.

Okay – then he talks about final inspection. Now, if some of you are contractors, builders, plumbers, electricians, drywallers, you know final inspection, right? If you've ever had a home improvement project done, you get a permit. You hire an architect. You get a permit. You deploy a crew. They do the job. At the end of it, the inspector comes. You hold your breath, and you hope that he signs you off so you actually can use what you've built. The metaphor he uses here is that Jesus is like a building inspector. And I love this, because my dad was a union drywaller till he broke his back, and now he's a building inspector, so this is like, "This reminds me of my dad."

Building inspector – the guy who shows up, and all of you tradesmen hate him, because he red-tags you and shuts you down. And this is what he talks

about Jesus regarding churches in verse 14. "If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." I'll make one quick theological point and move on. The Catholic church teaches that this verse teaches the doctrine of purgatory. This is actually the primary verse for the doctrine of purgatory.

It doesn't teach purgatory. When you die, you go to Heaven or hell. They teach there's this third option. You go to purgatory, and that there you're sort of purified through trial and fire, and that you grow in holiness until you're ready for Heaven. Well, Hebrews says it's appointed once for a man to die, then for judgment. You go to Heaven or hell. And this concept here of fire is not a fire of purifying you. It's also not a fire of hell. It's a fire of testing – that's what he says. That here's what happens: people live their life, churches live their life, and you don't really get your report card till the end. You stand before Jesus, like inspection day, and he tells you how you did.

And that testing is like a fire. And what he's saying is: if you haven't had a good plan for your life – and your church hasn't had a good plan for its ministry – that at the end there'll be a fire. And only those things, lives and churches, that were well-architected, well-built, with good materials, pass through and get approved. The rest just burn up, right? It's like you get a house built, and the guy says, "Oh, it'll withstand an earthquake!" Well, you really don't know till you've had an earthquake. And if it's still up, it was well-built. And if it collapses, it was poorly constructed.

Our lives and churches are like that – poorly or wisely constructed. Built with wisdom and good things, or built with folly and shortcuts. And your life goes through that, and there's a testing. Here's exactly what he's saying: that there will be churches at the end that the people will be saved – they're not gonna lose their salvation and go to hell. He says they will be saved, but they'll pass through the fire. What that means is this: there are people living their life today, and there are churches doing their thing today, that in the end are just gonna see everything they've worked for just burned up and consumed, and they'll be totally ashamed – totally ashamed.

I mean you get the picture of Jesus being the inspector and the arsonist – that's the metaphor here. I mean can you imagine if you heard, "And there is a wide outbreak of church arsons. Someone is torching churches by the thousands." And then a few weeks later they came on CNN and said, "And they've captured the fugitive, Jesus Christ." The concept is Jesus is going around burning churches down because they're not well-constructed. They don't have good leaders. They don't have good doctrine. They're not built on sound principles.

Their foundation is not him. Their people are not serving in the way that they should and giving in the way that they should. And so there will be a judgment. To be honest with you, I get frustrated sometimes because people in churches seem to just get away with murder – just do terrible things. And you think, "Gosh, is there no justice?" There will be one day. One day it's all gonna get straightened out. One day it's all gonna get judged. One day it will all be made known for what it truly is. So you and I need to wait for that day, and be organizing our lives and participating in our church anticipating that day of judgment.

And what he's teaching here is if what he has built survives – verse 14 – he will receive his reward, okay? Let me tell you this: there is a reward for those people in churches who are faithful. Jesus says this in Matthew 6; he says if you tithe generously and you're good with your money, God will reward you. If you pray faithfully and you intercede for others, God will reward you. And if you fast for the needs of others in God's Kingdom, God will reward you. Three times in Matthew 6, Jesus gives specific examples by money and fasting and prayer that God does reward. God does reward, and I'm telling you this: your reward may not be instantaneous.

It may not be till that day, the day when you finish your life, and you do your ministry, and you stand before Jesus. And Jesus looks at you and says, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And you don't want to be that guy who's standing before Jesus in the end, he looks at you, and he says, "It's all gonna burn. I'm gonna still let you in; you're my kid. But what you gave your time to, your money to, your energy to – what you gave your life to, the family you built, the company you built, the ministry you built, the church you participated in – that all is just trash. It's not fit for my Kingdom, and it is not going to make it. It's just all gonna burn. I still love you, but everything you've given yourself to was a waste."

Now, that is a sober day. That's a day that I want us all to avoid. I want us individually to stand before Jesus, hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Here's your reward." I want us as a church to stand before Jesus and have him say, "You passed inspection," not, "I'm burning Mars Hill to the ground because I can't stand that thing." Now, between here and there means architecting, serving, giving, foundation of Jesus, doing things with excellence – just like he's talking about. Now, some of you are struggling with this because you say, "Hey, I thought it was all about grace. This seems like works." It is about works – and grace.

Let me put this together for you. Jesus did tell us that we would be rewarded. In 1 Corinthians 3:8, previously, Paul said that each would be rewarded according to his works. So you think about it. You become a Christian, and you're faithful with your life, you get rewarded. If you're unfaithful, you get a different reward. Some of you say, "Well, wait, wait, wait – I thought we were saved by grace." Well, here's the deal: there is in Revelation 20:12 a judgment of works for the non-Christians. They will be punished in varying degrees, depending upon how much evil they did. Just like you and I will be rewarded in varying degrees, depending upon how faithful we were.

It says in Revelation 14:13 that for those who are Christians, that their good deeds – that their good works – will follow them into Heaven. That they'll pass through that testing flame. Some of you believe, "I am saved by grace," and that is true. Okay, if you're here today and you think that by being a good person, moral person, religious person, working hard, that God's gonna love you and you're gonna make it to Heaven, that is not how it works. You're saved by grace. Jesus lived the life. Jesus died the death. Jesus accomplished the victory through his resurrection. Jesus takes away sin. Jesus is God.

It's Jesus who saves you, not yourself. And he gives you salvation as a gift of grace. That's true – that's true. But – but – his saving grace then includes

empowering grace that enables you to live a life of good works and faithfulness, okay? Most Christians think, "I'm saved. I'm done." No. "I'm saved. I begin." That's what Paul says in Ephesians 2:8, 9, 10: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith. This is a gift of God through Jesus; not of ourselves that we can boast." And then he says, "To do the good works that God appointed in advance for us to do."

We're saved by grace, and then empowered by grace to do good works of ministry. This is the same thing Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:10: "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder." Paul says, "I'm good at building churches, by the grace that God gives me." See, now he's really not being arrogant. He's saying, "God has enabled me to do a good job, so I do a good job." That's humble confidence, saying that God's empowering grace enabled him to do a good job. He says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 15:10 at the end of the book. He says this: "I worked really hard, and I got a lot done, but it wasn't me. It was the grace of God which empowered and enabled me to serve God and do a good job." So it's still grace.

So let me ask you this: Jesus came back today. You got hit by a car. You're standing before him on inspection day. How does it go? Is it a great day? Do you say, "You know what, by God's grace, I feel like I'm serving him. I feel like my money, my time, my talent, my treasure, my love for my church, my service – I'm not perfect, I'm a sinner, but I have been changed. And I am excited, and I do feel like God has allowed me to be faithful, and I'll hear, 'Well done, good and faithful.'" Or are some of you thinking, "That would be a tragic day, because there's a lot of things I've put off.

"My relationships, my money, my ministry service – there's a lot of things in my life that just, quite frankly, are not well-architected. I haven't put a lot of work into. They're kind of shoddily, haphazardly put together, and they're not gonna pass through that testing flame at the end, and it's gonna burn. My business, my relationships, my marriage, my ministry – it's just gonna burn. Because it really is not a faithful, empowered by grace, service to Christ, like he desires."

I want us, as a church, to be an empowered by grace, faithful, humble, competent, capable, excellent church – excellent church. I believe that we have a wonderful opportunity to serve a wonderful city. I believe we have a wonderful opportunity to serve that city on behalf of Jesus Christ. I believe that you and I are here on divine appointment, all necessary – our dollars, our prayers, our service, our participation is incredibly important. And that every one of us is necessary to accomplish all of the things that Jesus would have for us.

But it comes down to individual people assessing themselves and asking, "Am I being faithful? Have I really even picked a God yet?" Do you know Jesus? Have I picked a church? Is this my home, or should I be elsewhere? Have I picked a ministry? Where will I serve? Where should I plug in? Have I picked the money that God would have me to give? Have I picked the prayers that God would have given me to pray? Have I picked the people that God has given me to serve, and done my part?

This is a crucial time for us as a church. It's not a sales pitch or a guilt, but what it is: it's the honest declaration that unless you see the church from the perspective of a pastor, and the massive church that we're trying to build, and all of the people that we're trying to care for, and all of the dollars that we're trying to steward, and all of the responsibilities that we're trying to execute, the result will be a bunch of people who don't really have the heart of Jesus for their city, and don't really have the heart of a pastor for their church.

So I give you a chance to respond today in prayer – become a Christian, give your sin to Jesus, ask him to forgive you – he will. If you're a Christian who feels encouraged, I want you to thank Jesus for his empowering grace and the fruit you are seeing in your life. If you are a Christian who feels convicted because you really don't think much about your church, you really don't think much about ministry, you really don't think much about Jesus, then this is a wonderful opportunity to have a change of heart and mind and direction, and to let God's grace empower you and enable you to do differently.

When you're ready to partake of communion, remembering Jesus body and bloodshed for sin; when you're ready, you give of tithes and offerings as God has apportioned you to give. And then we'll sing and we'll celebrate that this is all about Jesus, and we'll honor him. And that's why we exist as a church.

And so Jesus, I do thank you for these people and this church. Jesus, I first pray that we would all acknowledge that Mars Hill belongs to you. There may be things that we wish were different, but if we're obedient to you, that's what matters. And Jesus, I pray for us as leaders – me and the other pastors and deacons – that we would be good architects, thinking strategically, continually, about how most effectively to do the best job that we can. And Jesus, I pray for the people in this church who serve and give, that they would do an excellent job. That they would build carefully. And Jesus, I pray that our foundation would always be you. That it would be about you. I pray that the materials, the policies, systems, procedures, ideas – the way we do things – would be done with excellence, and that they would stand the test of time, and that this church wouldn't just collapse, it wouldn't fall apart, it wouldn't get off to a great start and a tragic demise. But Jesus, we would finish our race. That we would complete the task of building this church, and that people would meet you, and that by your grace they would be saved. And by your grace they would be empowered. And by your grace, they one day, too, would hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant." So Jesus, we thank you. We give Mars Hill to you. We give ourselves to you. Amen.

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