



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

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JUMP START # 519

Luke 15:1-2 "Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming hear Him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eat with them.'"

Our verse today sets the stage for three great parables of Jesus. Instead of simply answering these charges, Jesus told three parables-which in many ways could be seen as one parable with three points. The lost sheep...the lost coin...and the lost boys-we know the last one as the parable of the prodigal son. Those three lessons were Jesus' answer to those complaints from the Pharisees.

The Pharisees typically get a bum rap from most folks today. Sure they were narrow, but they were careful. They would rather be safe than sorry. They were conservative and they loved God. They made more rules than God did just to keep folks on the safe side of things. It was those rule, man-made as they were, that caused them to trip and stumble. Today, we'd look at those things as being opinions, but they were much stronger than opinions. To violate one of their rules, was to violate God's law, in their way of thinking.

Most of us would never see ourselves in the same hemisphere of thinking as those early Pharisees, but in fact, many of us can be when it comes to certain subjects. We all have opinions. Years ago I read an article where the author said "opinions are like noses-everyone has one and everyone thinks theirs is the best." Well said.

Opinions typically take us two places. First, we use our opinions to gauge other people. Our opinions become measuring rod as to how serious, how faithful, how close of a Christian someone might be. Our opinions are used to judge others. This is what happened in our Luke passage. Jesus didn't measure up. As a result, they could not view Jesus as the Messiah. The Holy One of Israel, in their minds, would not even get close to sinners. Their opinions did two things to them. First, it led to ridiculous conclusions. Opinions, especially the lopsided ones, tend to do that. They felt that Jesus should not eat with sinners. Simon had that problem when Jesus came to his home. A woman anointed the feet of Jesus with her tears. Simon fumed because if Jesus was indeed a prophet, He would have known what kind of person she was. Jesus did. Simon, and the rest of the Pharisees would rather Jesus avoid "those kind of people." Where their conclusion took them was really ridiculous. They never viewed themselves as sinners, but they were. If Jesus refused to eat with sinners, then He would have to eat every meal by Himself. He'd be like the kid at the school cafeteria who sits by Himself. They never got that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. It was the sick who need a physician. Opinions will do that. They will lead to crazy ideas, and the reason is that often we don't think out where our opinions lead us to. I've heard some whoppers before and the folks that stated them were adamant and unbending about them. Opinions tend to do that to us. We have a hard time letting them go or worse, associating with those who have a different opinion. That's hard for most folks.

The second place opinions take us to is to make us seem better than we are. Opinions do that. We use them to judge others and since they don't do what we do, they are wrong and we are right. That's the natural place opinions take us. That's what happened with the Pharisees. Jesus should not eat with sinners and since He was, He was wrong and they were right. Opinions can sometimes, often times, trip us and stand in the way of God's word.

We all have opinions- they become the steering wheel of our lives. Simply things such as which translation of the Bible I like, where I sit in the building, which songs the song leader ought to lead, how quickly mamas ought to take out crying babies, how dressed up we ought to be for services, how long prayers ought to be, where the elders ought to stand at the end of services, how warm or cool the temperature should be, how often someone ought to come and visit me and on and on we can go. And opinions generally flow into a conversation very innocently. Usually something like this, "You know, here's how I think they ought to do things..." and off we go telling others our opinions. My opinions are the best opinions, just ask me and I'll tell you. Isn't that just what happens?

Now, we all have opinions. Our past, our understanding of Scriptures, our influences, even the baggage we carry through life all shape and mold our opinions. So how can we get along? Strong opinions will butt heads and drive folks away. The Pharisees were good at that.

Here are a few of Roger's suggestions (boy, that sounds like opinions doesn't it):

- Know the difference between what the Bible teaches and what is your opinion. Those two are not always the same. Some versions of the Bible are better than others, but God doesn't "AUTHORIZE" which one.
- Understand that other people will have different opinions than I do. Again, we must stand upon God's word. There is no opinion about that. Saying something is white when God calls it black, isn't an opinion, it's wrong. That's plain and simple. Everyone has favorites and they are not the same. That's why there are so many options on the menu at the restaurant. Everyone has different tastes. Knowing this, and knowing the word of God, I must grasp that my thoughts help me steer my life, but they may not work for someone else. Their opinion fits them.
- For us to get along, we have to give up some of our opinions. We love the game Monopoly in the Shouse house. We have modified a few of the rules and call them "Shouse rules." When we play, we play by Shouse rules. Sometimes we have someone who doesn't know those rules or they don't like those rules. They've never played it that way. So, we often drop the Shouse rules so we can play the game. Some of our opinions have to go out the window when we are working with others. It's called cooperation. The Bible word is unity. What kills unity more than anything else is opinions. Everyone wants it their way. Have you ever noticed how many church buildings have little locked cases around the thermostats? It's not about theft-it's about the cold people making it warmer and the hot people making it cooler. The conclusion, was to lock the thermostat. That's a sad commentary on getting along. But it's worse when folks leave and break fellowship with a congregation because of opinions. They didn't get their way and so off they go.
- Most do not see themselves as opinionated. I know I don't. But I also know I have some rather powerful views of how things ought to be. Those in leadership have to especially watch their opinions because they influence so many. I had to chew some of my opinions recently. I'm a gadget guy and love technology, but a while back someone asked me what the Scripture reading was going to be on a Sunday morning. I noticed he didn't have a Bible. He looked it up on his cell phone. I'm a Bible guy. I like the book in my hand and I like to see the book. He took a phone. It bothered me. I had to get over it. What he read was word for word what my printed book said. There was no difference. It was a matter of technology and someone having a certain opinion. We are faced with things like that all the time. How we handle them says a lot about us.

We all have opinions. We must realize other people do to. We must realize what works for me may not work for others. Let's not be accusing folks of doing wrong, when they are doing right-they just happen to be doing things differently than my opinion allows.

Important thoughts for us to chew upon, I hope they help.

Roger Shouse

