



# THE EXHORTER

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

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***Hebrews 12:1 "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us"***

Our verse today is one of those great passages that is used often to encourage and motivate us to stay with it. You'll notice two "let us" expressions in this verse.

- Let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us
- Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us

The "Let us" reminded the readers that the author of Hebrews was included, involved and doing the same as they were. He was part of the "Let us." It wasn't, "You need to..." but rather, "let us." There are two thoughts I want to share from this great passage.

1. The great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Obviously, this is a carry over from chapter 11 and all those heroes of God who "by faith" gained approval. Those incredible men and women suffered and had to make righteous choices that were based upon their faith. Their choices often led to persecution and hard times. They are examples of people who endured. They ran the race to the finish.

This statement is often presented as taking place in the ancient stadiums. The Hebrew Christians were on the field. The stadium was filled with these great witnesses. They surrounded the Christians. They were cheering them on. Look, over there is Moses, giving a thumbs up. There is Daniel, smiling at you. There is Abraham, standing, applauding you. And on and on our imagination builds this great scene.

Nice thought, but I think that reads too much into this and it opens the door for other things that we haven't considered. These ancient heroes surround us, not in a stadium, but in Scriptures. These Hebrew Christians were contemplating throwing in the towel on Christianity and returning to being Jews. Life as Jews was peaceful for them. Since becoming Christians, persecution has followed them, mainly from fellow Jews. Going back to simply being a Jew would eliminate a lot of problems in their life. Some did that. Others were thinking about following.

The book of Hebrews is written to show that going back was not the answer. Christ was superior in every way to the Old Testament system. Better sacrifice, better hope, better covenant, better rest, better high priest, better law-that was all in the New Testament, which they were thinking about leaving.

And if anything, the Old Testament, to which they were fleeing to, showed example after example of endurance and patience. Abraham waited a long time before the promise child was born. Moses, endured the afflictions of Egypt. Joseph, sold by brothers, imprisoned in Egypt, remained faithful and dedicated to God.

That is the message of these heroes. The very Old Testament that these suffering Christians were running to, would tell them to endure and finish the race they stated. It is the Scriptures, the very Scriptures that they thought would give them relief, that told them to press on and endure. That is how these heroes surrounded them.

If we are not careful, we paint a picture that the dead can actively see what we are doing. And if the righteous dead are cheering us on, what about the unrighteous dead? You see, a great illustration, if not thought out, can create more questions and problems than we anticipated.

2. Lay aside the sin which so easily entangles us. All sin can trip us. We can get sin wrapped all around us like strands of Christmas lights. Sin keeps us from progressing. Sin is a step in the wrong direction. Following sin, is guilt, shame, punishment and consequences. Those always follow.

I find it interesting that the passage says "the sin which so easily entangles." He didn't write, "Sins," but "the sin." It sounds as if there was something specific that he had in mind. All sin will mess us up, but here the problem was unbelief. This chapter follows the "by faith" chapter. Faith was the issue. Their eyes were fixed upon problems rather than the Lord. Surrounding them was men and women who maintained faith, even in difficult circumstances. The sin is unbelief. It is the greatest of all sins. It generates questions and feeds doubt. Unbelief will put the brakes on our motion. Unbelief smoothers hope. Prayers, attendance, enthusiasm all fade away when doubt and unbelief is allowed to grow. There is no endurance as long as doubt is hanging around.

The solution is to lay aside "the sin." How? By going to the Scriptures. It is the Scriptures that give us this compelling reason to believe. It is the Scriptures that show us these stirring stories of hope and faith. It is the Scriptures that surround us, protect us, help us and lead us to the Lord. Lay aside the sin and run with endurance.

I fear that too often we feed our doubts and not our faith. We spend too much time reading junk and not Scriptures. We listen to critics complain about what's wrong with what we hold dear. We allow shallow friends to influence us. We read books that foster doubt. Is it any wonder that some begin to question fundamental things that they once held dear. If a person feeds on poison, we shouldn't be shocked that he begins to feel sick. The same is true spiritually. Do not be conformed, but be transformed. I'm no different than you. Every day I have folks sending me emails and stuff on facebook, excited about this article or this report or this finding and wanting to know my thoughts about it. Feeding doubts or building faith...Listening to critics or listening to Christ?

Lay aside the sin that entangles you. I have no problem with the person who says, "I'm not sure anymore." That doesn't bother me. What bothers me is what he does with that. Usually, he stays home, away from God's people and God's word and feeds his doubts. For a person to say, "I don't see it that way, but let's dig into it. I want to know." He's feeding faith. He's finding answers. Some will use questions as a quick excuse to quit. They don't want to admit that they are bored, not trying very hard, or are as interested as a rock. Instead, "I have doubts." So they don't do anything with those doubts. That is nothing more than a door to exit through.

Lay aside the sin. If you have questions, dig, in the Bible, not the blogs, for your answer. If you doubt, don't stay away from truth, go to the truth and find the answers.

Feeding doubts or faith...which are you doing?

Roger Shouse

