



# 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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***Ephesians 3:3-4 "that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ."***

Our verse today helps us understand two valuable aspects of our faith: inspiration and the reading of God's word. Twice in these verses Paul uses the word "mystery." This is not like a mystery novel or a murder-mystery show on TV, where someone must try to figure out what happened. There was no figuring out. Mystery, as used in the original language, meant something that was revealed or uncovered. God knew all along what the message was. When the time was right, He revealed it to the apostles. They, in turn, wrote this down and when we read what they wrote, we can understand God's message.

Three simple thoughts here:

**First, it was the apostles that were inspired.** The revelation came to the apostles. We use the concept of "inspired" to define having an idea. An artist, composer, or writer get "ideas" or "inspiration" to use their talents. Their "inspiration" was not directed by God through the Holy Spirit. The inspiration of the apostles was not in painting pictures or writing poems, but in recording God's word. Every word was important. The exact order of the words was important. This was not left to human imagination. God guided the apostles. The message wasn't interpreted differently by each person. Art can be that way. You stand in a gallery and someone asks, what does it mean to you? God's word is not that way. He has a specific message. The meaning is God given.

This work of inspiration from God is completed. The word of God is closed. No more books are being written. No more messages are coming. Folks don't seem to get that today. Jude 3 tells us that the faith has been once delivered. Peter said that all things pertaining to life and godliness has been given. No writer today, and that especially includes me, is inspired by God. God is not directing, telling or using "divine urges" to write

paragraphs in books, in spite of what Beth Moore and other leading authors believe and claim. What the apostles wrote was considered the "commandments of Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 14:37). Are we to assume, when these modern writers claim that God moved them to write, that their words, their books ought to be included in our Bibles? That is a serious claim to assume that God is telling someone what to write. It makes what they say more credible, but it falters when what they write goes against known inspiration of God. Now, there's a problem. The moderns who claim that God is leading them, are not toe-to-toe with the written word. This illustrates the shallowness of their use of the expression "God led me."

**Second, God chose written words as the vehicle to communicate His will.** There are many forms of communication. Feelings communicate. Remember back when you were first dating someone, and they held your hand for the very first time. Nothing had to be said. That said it all. The looks in our eyes often tell if we approve, are confused or are angry. Feelings communicate. Signs communicate. I've been on nature trails and there would be a wooden post in a ground with a number on it and an arrow. Trail 2 pointing to the left. That was a form of communication. If I went straight, I would no longer be on trail 2. That's a form of communication. Speech is one of the best forms of communication. God incorporated that with the written word. The word was preached and the word was written. Today, we use the written word as a basis of sermons and classes.

There is something special about the written word. Words have meanings that can be studied, understood and shared. Words can cross over into other languages. It's hard to do that with feelings. Words can be copied. Words can be memorized. Words are timeless and ageless. I was reading a few pages the other day that were first written in the 1820's. The words have outlived the person who authored them. It outlived the first owners of the book they were in. It outlived the next several owners of the book. Most likely, those words in that old book, will out live me. Words are like that. God chose words. Those words trump feelings. Those words remove doubt and opinions. Those words are ageless and true.

**Third, Paul expected the Ephesians, and all people since, to read his words.** When you read, he said, you will understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. What did Paul know about Jesus? We know. Read what Paul wrote. So, we see a connection in this verse between God and us. God revealed. The apostles wrote. We read what was written. That is the bridge from us to God and from God to us. That is how Biblical knowledge and understanding is built. John said that we know we have eternal life by reading the words that he wrote (1 Jn 5:13). You know you are saved, not by a feeling, a sign, but by comparing your life to the word of God.

This tells us that we need to spend serious time reading the Bible. It is the only way we will know God's will. There are two inherit thoughts with this. First, we must trust the Bible to be true, accurate and authentic. There are avenues to prove this. The external evidence is overwhelming. The manuscripts and writings of early Christians give us mountains of proof that our Bibles today is God's word. There is nothing missing. There is nothing added that should not be there. The proof and evidence stacks up in that favor. If a person

doesn't trust his Bible, then he won't read. Find a reliable translation, not a paraphrase. Find one that is comfortable for you to use. If you do not like your Bible, you will not read it. Find one that has print that is comfortable for your eyes. Find one that feels good in your hands. Your Bible is your connection to God. Without the Bible you do not know God.

This also tells us that we must read. Paul said that. "When you read..." (**Eph. 3:4**) he wrote. God expects us to read. Now this is a challenge to this generation more than any other. Folks simply do not like to read. Oh, they'll look at a text message on their phone, or read an email, if it's short. But far too many have stopped reading. We watch videos, TV, movies. We listen to music. But reading? That is one treasure I have received from my dad. He loves to read. Still does. All of my siblings are readers. My kids have grown up in a house full of books. Reading is such a blessing and a joy. Alone with a book, especially, God's book...there is nothing else like that. Too busy to read? Slow down. Too much racing through your head to read? Calm down and make the time. Make the time every day. A little here and a little there. Look at words. Look at what happened. Learn. Grow. Soon you are seeing the mystery. Soon you are understanding. Soon you find yourself becoming. That is why God's word is living and active. It does something to us. There is no other book that has that affect upon us.

God revealed...the apostles wrote...you and I read. 1-2-3. That's the connection. That's how faith grows. That's where confidence comes from. That's the secret to survival. Read it and believe. Read it and do. Read it and become.

Roger Shouse