



THE EXHORTER

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

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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Jump Start # 1114

1 Corinthians 11:18 *“For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it.”*

Our verse today begins the section about instructions concerning the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is special. The example in the New Testament is that it was taken on Sunday, the day Jesus rose from the grave. It is a memorial, a look back to Calvary, as well as a look forward to His return. The Lord's Supper, itself does not forgive sins. That is done by the blood of Jesus. However, the Lord's Supper is a huge part of Sunday worship.

Paul states in our verse today, "...when you come together as a church..." There is an implied intention and direction in that statement. We come as a church. When mama says the meal is ready, we come to the dinner table as a family to eat. When we come together as a church, we come with the purpose and intention of doing what a church does-worship, fellowship, and encouraging one another. Involved is singing, praying, teaching God's word and in this Scripture, partaking of the Lord's Supper. That's what a church does. That's what coming together is about. The intention is spiritual. The purpose is spiritual. The benefit is spiritual.

There is great benefits of being together. Often, these can be taken for granted and overlooked. Those who have missed because of long illnesses miss these great benefits.

- There is a shared love among each other. We get to know one another and our togetherness leads to a deep love and care for one another. It is a highlight of any day when we run into one of our church family. It is especially delightful to meet them in church. It's like when the grown kids return home to visit mom and dad. There is a joy in seeing each other. There is a bond that unites our hearts. This is why it is important to connect and know your church family. You need them. You need their prayers. You need them in your life. They remind you and help you. Those that often ask, "Do we have to go to all the services, " miss this point. There is such a goodness from seeing each other. We want to be with each other. There is such goodness that comes from our times together.
- There is a mutual benefit from worshipping together. We are made stronger by our numbers. Bibles opening, heads bowing, voices mingling together in praise of the God that we love so much, the sharing together of the Lord's Supper-it unites all of us. The blue collars and the white collars, the young and the old, singles and widows, those with little kids and the empty nesters, those just starting the walk of faith and those about to finish that walk-all together. Years of collected experience and

knowledge. Folks who are happy and joyful, joining in with those who are sad and broken hearted. The parents of prodigals, with those who have buried a loved one, with those who have lost jobs, with those who are excelling in life-all singing, all praying, all looking to that wonderful Savior for guidance and help. Different needs, different places in life-yet the same when it comes to worship. All needing to pray. All needing to praise. All needing forgiveness. All longing for Heaven. Red, yellow, black and white-gathered together in love for a God that loves them. This is what coming together as a church means.

- There is a positive peer pressure when we come together. We see, learn and hear about the good that some are doing. We see regular folks, just like us, teaching classes and putting their all into helping us learn the will of God. We see folks going out of their way to talk to someone who is having a tough time. All of this impacts us. It reminds us that we need each other. It compels us to do what we can. Surely the family in Christ can count upon me. What can I do to help out? This drives and motivates us to engage in goodness. What a great family in Christ we have.
- We see those who acknowledge sins and cry out for help. They are hurting because they have hurt Christ. It illustrates that we are not perfect. It is not a perfect church. It will never be a perfect church. We all fight and struggle with temptation. Some days are better than others. Some days we need help and other days we are there to help others. Church is one of the few places that we can actually remove our masks and let others see the real us. We are not pretty, polished and perfect. We are reformed sinners who are trying to keep in step with Jesus. It's hard. Some days are better than others. Church is not the place for finger pointing and judging and gossip. That's the world. We get that every day. That's work. Much too often, that's family. It's different within a church. Our hearts break when one messes up. We swell with joy when one promises to do better. These moments remind us that all of us deal with sin. The church is the home that the prodigal returns to. There, awaiting us, is our Heavenly Father. There awaiting us, is not older brothers who are angry, but others, who have been where we are. Others who are standing right beside Our Father who want to embrace, encourage and be there for us. That's church. That's the way it ought to be. It's a place that loves me, even when I messed up. It's a place that won't give up on me. There's no throwing under the bus. There's no kicking out or you are not welcome here.

Gathered together as a church. I like that expression. I wish we were gathering together this evening. We are busy with much to do, but things are just different when we are together. Hope seems brighter and love is certainly stronger when we are together.

Are you a part of such a group? People just like you who want to love, obey and follow the Lord. People who have set their eyes upon Heaven and their heart upon doing what the Bible says in the Bible way. Not progressive. Not innovative. Not new. Not different. Not cutting edge. But folks that want that old, old gospel. Tell me the story of Jesus, write on my heart every word...Those kind of people. Those that are serious, committed and dedicated to the ways of God. They are done playing church. They are through with hypocrisy. They are genuine. They love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. They are the people of God. They look just like you. They are not perfect, but they are forgiven. They are still learning, trying and doing their best. That's the church that you need to be a part of. God's people.

Gathered together as a church...what a great expression and a better experience that is.

Roger Shouse

