



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 # 1111

Proverbs 20:3 "Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel."

It seems that there are always extremes in life. There is one extreme and then there is an opposite extreme. We call this balance. This is understood in our choices in life. Too much work without a break is not good. All break without any work is not good either. It's a matter of balance. This is true in finance. Spending all you make is not good, neither is saving all you make any better. You can't take it with you. It's a matter of balance. Preachers understand the value of balance in selecting what sermons they will preach. They can't ignore doctrine or basics, but neither can they spend all their time there either. It's balance.

Our verse today is not about balance but it must be understood to properly grasp this passage. Keeping away from strife is an honor. Any fool will quarrel. On the surface it sounds as if all quarrels are wrong. It sounds as if we ought to avoid all arguments period. Try that with parenting. It won't last long. Try to get a five year old to bed when he doesn't want to go to bed. Try to convince a high school student why dropping out of school is a bad idea. There will be arguments and quarrels.

Even among God's people, sometimes quarrels happen. Someone wants to push the buttons on what the Bible allows, and wants to introduce radical ideas and radical changes, what are the faithful to do? Sit back and watch everything that they hold dear be changed by a few who do not respect the authority of God? Certainly not. There will be a dog fight. The faithful will circle the wagons and hold their ground with God.

So, balance is important. Our verse is not intending to lead us to the conclusion that all arguments are wrong. It is not saying that the man of honor will not engage those who differ with him. There are too many other verses that show us the other side. Balance.

What this verse is driving at is the spirit of argumentation. Some like to stir things up. Some like to play the devil's advocate. Some like a good old fashioned quarrel. They love to see the exchange. Some radio and TV shows thrive on that platform. Bring in two people with differing ideologies and ask one hot question and sit back and watch the hornets buzz. Pushing the hot button brings TV ratings but it does little else. People get loud and agitated, blood pressures rise, fingers are pointed at each other, but little change takes place.

It's easy to quarrel. Some marriages are a constant battle. Fussing is as normal as coffee in the morning. One is never pleased with the other. Something is always wrong. Often, it's not the subject that matters, it's the tone and the very nature of quarrelling. It's like picking scabs. The wound never heals. The picking and picking gets rougher and uglier as years pass.

There are two underlining things I see here.

First, not every skirmish, not every battle is worth engaging. I went to a Civil War battle field the other day. It's not very big and it doesn't bring much attention in the study of the Civil War. It was the only battle in Indiana. John Morgan's confederates crossed the Ohio River in 1863 and came to Corydon, IN. Locals tried to hold them off. It didn't last long and they surrendered. The town surrendered. He and his men took what they wanted and went on down the road. Other towns simply gave up without a shot. They knew better. In the big picture of things there is a war that must be won. The goal is salvation of souls, starting first with your family. Some of the things we parents fuss about, and I was good at this, really do not matter. You let some battles go as long as you win the overall war. Getting the family to Heaven is most important. Morals, attitudes, dating, worship, language, faith, modesty-those are war issues. How they mow the yard, clean their car, whether they get up five minutes before it's time to go, some of those are battle issues. Win the war. Don't quarrel about everything. Don't be known as the fussy parent who was never pleased. Battles and war are what we must look at down at the church house. Fussy preachers...fussy elders...fussy brethren. Some things may not be to my liking, but as long as Christ wins the war, that's what is important. Pick your battles. Remember balance. Win the war.

Second, what is missing in all of this is a state of calm. Quarreling upsets the stomach, feelings and peace. Quarrels leave us on edge. We are not happy when quarrels are taking place. Quarrels open the door for anger, hatred and other mean things such as slander, malice and violence. Quarrels stretch and often break relationships. It's hard to be buddy-buddy with someone that you are upset and fussing with.

Some things are out of our hands. We can do nothing about it. Grown people, even our children, have a mind of their own and they will choose to do what they want. Fussing parents won't change that. They must want to change. When they don't, there isn't much a parent can do. You can't send a grown child who lives in his own house, to his room. That doesn't work any more. Some folks are convinced of wrong things. You can show them, plead with them and try to teach them the truth. Some won't give up wrong ideas. There is not a lot that you can do. Quarreling, screaming, threatening, getting ugly in their face won't get them to change. Some things are out of our hands. Do what you can, but some are going to be responsible for the thoughts and actions that they have.

Quarreling at the TV seems silly to me. First of all, the people on TV can't hear you. You can preach all you want but you don't have any impact upon them. If those kind of shows upset you, don't watch them.

There is a certain peace and calm that needs to prevail in the heart of Christians. God is upon the throne. There is a peace with that. There is a peace that comes with forgiveness and righteous living. The world may go to the toilet, but I don't have to join them. My hope is in the Lord.

It is an honor not to quarrel. See if you can get through the day without a quarrel, however remember, balance and remember to win the war! Some things need to be said. Say it. Some things don't need to be said. Don't say it. This isn't easy and it takes a lot of thinking and praying first. That's where most folks miss it. They forget to think and they forget to pray.

Roger Shouse

