



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 # 1057

Galatians 5:15 “But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.”

Sometimes a person forgets. Sometimes a person forgets the important stuff. The stereotypical view of man is one who never remembers his wedding anniversary. Our passage deals with brethren who forgot who the enemy was. They turned on each other.

The NASV presents a series of verses in this context that all start with the word "But."

- V. 11 But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted?
- V. 15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another
- V. 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit...
- V. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit...
- V. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is..

Our passage, verse 15, follows a reminder to love your neighbor as yourself. This is when Paul warns, "But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another." The brethren had turned on each other. They were fighting each other. They were going to destroy one another. They seemed to have forgotten that they were family in Christ. They were united by the blood of Jesus. They were after the same thing.

Why is it that some "bite and devour" others?

Some don't mean to be destructive. They actually think that they are helpful. They point out things that they believe are wrong. Often, it's just opinions. Often it's more hurtful than helpful. Much too often, the one picking doesn't look into his own life as much as he looks into others. There must be time given for some to grow. There must be some patience allowed for change. Just a few verses later, when Paul details the works of the flesh, he lists strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions and envying. This may well be some of the "biting" that was taking place.

Some expect perfection in everyone except themselves. One mistake. One misspoken word. One fumble. One sin. One error. That's all it takes, and some are ready to throw the violator off the bus. This is not a call for tolerating wrong. This is not a plea to look the other way. There are Biblical ways to handle sin. The next chapter states, "if anyone is caught in a trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness..." That's God's way. Don't look the other way. Help a person. But help them not by biting and destroying them, but with gentleness. Feelings matter. Your tone, your choice of words, is it constructive or a death sentence? We are not perfect. The congregation is not perfect. Jesus is, but we are not. We must work

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on our own sin. We must help others with their sin. Bite leads to devouring which becomes consuming. When I consume my food, there is nothing left. It's gone. When brethren turn on each other in a destructive manner, they destroy the congregation. People leave. Some quit. This is not how Christians are supposed to act. But they do. Churches split. People get angry. Threats are uttered. Fingers point to each other. The work of God stops. The extreme cases lead to physical violence, lawsuits and the formation of a new congregation that will ignore the other one.

Some expect everyone to accept their opinions and their suggestions. The Romans and the Corinthians had problems with what to do with meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Eat it. Don't eat it. If some eat, and some don't-what does that mean? Are those who don't eat more spiritual than those who do eat? An atmosphere of judging and condemning was brewing on the horizon. Paul wrote from inspiration. The solution from Heaven was not a meat eating congregation and a vegetarian congregation. Division was not considered. Paul showed that God accepted both. Then the principles: they had to be mindful of each other. They were not to offend each other. Their relationship was greater than eating or not eating meats. They each had to be convinced in their own mind. Those thoughts make a great Bible study, but some how we tend to forget those thoughts when selecting a preacher, appointing an elder, building a church building, or deciding what kind of sign we will put out in front of the church building. Everyone has a thought. When their thought is not followed, then they get upset. This is when the forks come out and the biting and devouring starts. The little things can upset us the most. True character comes out at those moments. We see who has pride and selfishness issues. We tend to think it's everyone who disagrees with me, never giving any thought that I could be the one with the pride and selfishness. The Ephesians were told to be subject to one another. That expression means to bend the will. Get along with others. Let others go first. Let others have their way. Again, as if we even have to say this, we are not saying wrong must be allowed. We are not saying, someone who has a sinful agenda must be allowed his way and his turn. Not at all. We don't give sin a moment's thought. Too often however, if someone disagrees with us, we immediately consider that to be sin, when it is not. God declares what is sin. Sin is a violation of His will, not a violation of my opinion. There is a difference. Many things we fuss about are not right or wrong. Selfish people demanding their way or the highway ruin the faith of others. They run rough shod over the feelings of others. They make a mockery of Jesus' teaching about love, compassion and acceptance. Spiritual bullies should not be allowed to have their way. Talking loud, dominating conversations, making ridiculous statements, threats and conclusions do not prove their point. Some cave in because they don't want a fuss. Some fear controversy. Some allow others to bite them and devour them. What results is a congregation with weak leadership is forced to cater to the bullies among them. The only hope is a job transfer that may take them away or death. There are far too many congregations like this. For anyone to make an opposing suggestion is to be met immediately with teeth that are going to bite and devour them. They are chewed out in front of others. They are made fun of. They are ridiculed and told to sit in silence. I know. I've seen these things. I held my peace when I should not have. I've seen good people devoured by opinionated people.

The flow of the context of Galatians shows the solution to this ugly mess. But walk by the Spirit (16) and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. But if you are led by the Spirit (17) you are not under the law. But the fruit of the Spirit (22) is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Those are not biting words. Those are the words that make a person put down the folk and treat others as he should. Those words remind us that we are on the same side. The enemy is Satan, not us. If we fight each other, we only help Satan. We are to help each other. Help each other be strong. Help each other stand tall. Help each other overcome.

Spiritual cannibalism is what our verse is about. I've heard stories of some desperate folks, long ago, like the Donner party, who were forced to eat their own dead. Disgusting. Spiritually, it's more than disgusting, it's the work of Satan.

The enemy is not each other. Your attitude. Your words. Your tone. Your prayers. These all reveal what you think of others in the congregation. We need each other. We are to be there for each other. We are God's family.

The Galatians forgot. It's up to us NOT to forget!

