



# 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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**Galatians 2:13** *“The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.”*

Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites several times in Matthew 23. Now, we read about some of the early leaders getting mixed up in hypocrisy. In our passage, Paul confronts the apostle Peter. Before this, it was Peter who first preached to Cornelius, a Gentile. It was Peter who led the way in accepting Gentiles into the fellowship of God's grace. Now, Peter felt the pressure from the Jews. They didn't want Gentiles. They felt Gentiles had to at least become circumcised, becoming pseudo Jews, to be accepted. There was a huge discussion about this in Jerusalem. Paul was there. Barnabas was there. Peter was there. The Holy Spirit revealed that circumcision was not a requirement for salvation. God had spoken. That news was taken into neighboring congregations. All seemed good. It did, until Peter felt the pressure from some Jews who would not accept what God said. Crumbling to that pressure, Peter refused to associate with the Gentiles. He was too good for them. He had nothing to do with them. This after all those things showing otherwise. Peter's influence trickled down to others, including Barnabas. They got caught up in this hypocrisy.

This is all interesting because a hypocrite doesn't have to fake everything to be guilty of hypocrisy. Peter still believed in Christ. He still wanted the kingdom to grow. His hypocrisy was in a small area, how he treated Gentiles. Everywhere else, he seemed to still be clicking along fine with the Lord. This form of hypocrisy is harder to detect. Overall Peter was doing everything right. Overall Peter was genuine. But in this one area, he slipped. It happened to Peter, it can also happen to us.

We can be hitting on all cylinders but hold a touch of prejudice in our hearts. That hypocrisy will hurt us and eventually come out. Prejudice isn't always about skin color. It can be, but there are other forms. We can be prejudiced toward someone who moves in to our area. They have not grown up here. They are not one of us. The way we talk about "them," and treat "them" becomes obvious because we do not allow "them" to be one of "us." There can be age prejudice. Old toward young and young toward old. We can be prejudiced against ideas, change, and doing things differently. Not unscriptural, but different. Starting services at a different time. A different way of having meetings or classes. Some are flat out against all things different, even if different is an improvement.

Our passage also shows us the two sides of influence. Peter was influenced by the Jews and then he influenced Barnabas. Hypocrisy spreads, like mold in a basement corner. I wonder why Peter didn't stand up and speak out against ignoring the Gentiles. He didn't. I wonder why Barnabas didn't

stand up and speak up against Peter. He stuck his neck out for Paul when the Jerusalem church didn't want anything to do with him. But now, Barnabas goes along. He avoids. He shuns. It must have really hurt these Gentile Christians. It's one thing to be ignored by others, but when Barnabas, who was named that by the apostles because he was the son of encouragement, and Peter, the one who walked with the Lord, one of the chosen apostles, when they also refused to accept Gentiles, they must have been crushed. How terrible this was. Jesus had been with Samaritans, but Peter wouldn't have anything to do with them. Jesus included a tax collector among the apostles, but Peter wouldn't have anything to do with them.

Hypocrisy is wrong and it hurts. It distorts the image of Christ and leaves a sour taste in the mouth of others. All the sermons that Peter had preached could be taken away by one foolish act of hypocrisy.

There is another strong point in this text. Paul confronted Peter to his face. He didn't tell the other apostles. He went to Peter. He had a showdown with him. Peter had no proof, evidence nor hope of being right. He was so wrong. And what happened is that Peter changed. He stopped the hypocrisy. That's the great hope in all of his. It's not once a hypocrite, always a hypocrite. No sir! Peter changed. Read his letters. Notice who he writes to. His message is for all.

It takes a lot of courage to do what Paul did. He had faith in Peter. He knew that Peter wasn't thinking. We do that. We say things that we shouldn't. We often do not mean those things, but they just come out. When told, we apologize and stop. We learn. We get better. It's hard telling someone that he is wrong. Kindness and love are the threads that run through such a conversation.

I read a book years ago about the "little Pharisee in each of us." I tend to agree with that. I think that is something conservative minded people have to work on. We can be so narrow that we don't allow anyone through the front door. There is a bit of Peter in all of us. We must watch it and catch it and work on getting it out of us. The young college kid with goofy hair, coming in late, wearing last week's clothes, can bother the suit and tie crowd, but you know, he's there. He didn't skip out. He didn't stay in bed. Or, the young lady who is tattooed and pierced and this week has pink hair. We may see her coming in and silently pray that she does not sit by us. Why? There's that little bit of Peter rising to the surface. Or, the person who has some slight mental issues. Or, the guy who smells. Or, the person who wants to know everything. The little Peter in us can make us think, "why don't they go some where else." Really? Maybe God thinks that about us! Going into all the world, means everyone of the world. That includes someone who is from the middle East. That includes someone who rides a Harley. That includes someone who rides the bus. That includes me.

We call can have a bit of hypocrisy in us. It doesn't mean that we've tossed in the towel. Peter hadn't. But there were some folks Peter didn't want around. We can be the same.

The solution to all of us? Look at Jesus. Look where He went. Look who He spent time with. EVERYONE. That's the hope. Be like Jesus. Compassion and love replace prejudice and hatred.

So, as you look in the mirror today, do you notice Peter standing behind you? You're not alone. Work at driving all the prejudice, hypocrisy and wiggly thinking out of your heart. You'll be a better person when you do and you'll help more people when you do.

Roger Shouse

