



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 # 1223

1 John 4:7 *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God' and everyone who loves is born of God and know God.”*

The book of 1 John could be called the "love" book. Multiple times throughout these few pages John brings us the idea of love. The word John uses has nothing to do with emotions, feelings, candlelight, romance or holding hands. Instead, it's a choice. It's a choice to care and do the best toward another. It's not based upon how the other person feels or treats you. This is the way God loves. God loved us when we were healed spiritually. God loves us not because we are so cute and adorable, but because He chooses to.

John stresses our love for one another. We can't and don't really love God if we can't love God's people. A person can't choose God but thumbs down to God's people. It's all or none. Now, what is interesting is getting down to the nitty-gritty about loving one another. This is often hard to do and this often strains a fellowship in a congregation.

Many today would say, 'Just preach Jesus and leave everyone else alone.' For them, the word love means to look the other way and just accept each other, with no questions asked. The "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy of the military is how some feel it ought to be within the congregation.

However, that doesn't work at home. The teenager comes in past curfew, don't you think caring parents are going to be asking a few questions? I did. I kept asking until I got answers. Now is that loving? Would we say the loving thing to do is to just let them come in any hour they feel like and just love them for who they are? Are you kidding? That's a dopey idea most likely made up from someone who has never been a parent. The loving thing to do is to guide and be involved in their lives.

Tolerance of wrong isn't loving. It's a sign of being a coward. The loving thing to do is to help someone who is not doing right to start doing right. Now there are ways this ought to be done. Reading them the riot act, threatening them, getting in their face is abusive, rude and definitely a violation of the Golden Rule. However, doing nothing is just about as bad. If I care, if I truly love, then my heart will be there for them.

Love one another. This can be hard. We do not have the same personalities, the same outlooks, the same needs, nor the same spiritual strengths. It's easy to love those who are like me. It's easy to find those who have similar interests and love them. But those who are different, those we have little in common with, there lies the challenge. Being thoughtful, caring, open and inviting to others, all others is the key to turning the congregation into a real spiritual family.

(OVER)

Love means forgiving. That's hard. Love means patience. That's hard. Love means accepting the little quirks that can drive others batty. It means loving the guy who is always asking so many questions. It seems that he is prying. It means loving the one who never says a word. You wonder what is going through their mind. They never open up. They never reveal. They keep everything close to the vest. They are a mystery to us because we simply do not know them. We'd love to, but they won't allow that. Love them. Love the person who always has an answer, even though often it's the wrong answer. We are not just talking about Bible questions, any situation. They know what you need to do. They know the car you need to buy next. They know what school you kids need to attend. They know where you ought to vacation next. They know. You know they know because they always tell you. Love that person. Love the one who always sighs and leans toward the negative side of life. Things are always a bit darker from their perspective. They tend to see problems more than others do. Love them. Love the person who loves to show off. He's got a new car. He'll show it to you. He has the latest I-thing. He'll show you. He's got this and that and just about everything else. You still have a dumb phone and drive an old car, and wonder how in the world this guy affords all those things. Love him. Love the person who seems to bounce in and out of the Lord. When they are in, they are full of fire. But like a meteor striking across the sky, the bounce out just as quickly. They're gone for months and then they are back. Often, while out, they made poor choices and come with many apologies and promises to do better. They seem to have a hard time sticking. In and out. Back and forth. It's weary watching all this. Love them. Then there is the bean counting deacon who is worried about every penny the church spends. Love him. Then there is the excessive spending preacher who acts as if the church prints money on the side. Love him. Mr. Conservative. Love him. Mr. Progressive. Love him. The one who thrives on controversy. Love him. The one who worries that dooms day has already started. Love him. The guy who can't carry a tune in a bucket and yet he leads singing. Love him. The one who mumbles when he gives announcements and mispronounces names. Love him.

Love them all. Care for all of them. Be there for all of them. Pray for them. Help them.

And why should you do this? First, because the Bible says so. And second, because Jesus loves you. We forget that we are not poster children for God's next hall of fame. Most of us have scars, baggage and a past that isn't so pretty. God loves us, includes us, uses us and works through us. If He can do that, we can certainly do the same with the rest of God's family.

God's family-you just have to love them. We can be an odd group, but we are trying to be the people of God. You wonder just what prompted John and the Holy Spirit to mention love so many times. Maybe even back then, they had problems with "one another."

Loving each other isn't easy...but it can be done. Try it.

Roger Shouse

