



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 #1270

Hebrews 2:1 *“For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.”*

The writer of Hebrews is trying to get suffering Christians to hang in there. Some couldn't take it any longer. It was too much for them. Life was easier and a lot less painful and stressful when they were Jews. Since becoming Christians, things had increasingly become more difficult. Persecution was intense. There was no slowing down of the pressure and fear. Some quit. They went back to being Jews. Others were thinking about doing the same. These words were written to keep them from doing that. In saving their lives, they were throwing away their souls by returning to Judaism. Salvation was in Christ. They couldn't walk away from the Lord.

Our verse is one of many principles that illustrated what these brethren needed to do. Those same words work for us. Our problem is not persecution. Ours is staying focused. Ours is the fight against temptation, worry, materialism and apathy. We need these same words. Pay close attention to what we have heard.

Pay close attention. The details matter. Sweat the small the small stuff, because even the small stuff matters. Not paying attention is where we get into trouble. This is true in driving. Distractions are serious threat to safe driving. It once was simply keep your hands on the wheel and don't mess with the radio. It's much more than that today. It's texting while driving. It's eating while driving. It's talking on the phone while driving. Those things cause one to be distracted. The distracted driver doesn't pay close attention. He drifts over the center line. He drives too fast. He is a danger to others.

Details matter. If you are working on a building project, something as small as a couple of inches matters. Boards that are supposed to connect don't. Pipes don't line up. The new carpet is just a few inches too short. The new car won't fit into the garage. The pants are too tight to button. It doesn't take much. Just a little bit off, here or there and there can be a real problem. Details do matter.

Doesn't the same thought apply in our faith and worship? Details matter. Pay close attention. Ask Nadab and Abihu after they offered the strange fire which God had not commanded. Fire that did not come from the altar. Fire that had not been dedicated to the Lord. Fire is fire, right? Pay close attention. God rejected their worship and took their lives. It's not enough that we just love Jesus, we must pay close attention to what Jesus said. I've heard folks say so comfortably, "It's not a salvation issue." In other words, it really doesn't matter. God doesn't care. We can differ and that's just fine. Well, what are the "salvation issues" and "what are not the salvation issues?" It seems that if something is in the Bible, it is pretty important. Certainly there are some application differences. We are to pray to God. How much and how often? Is someone who prays five times a day better than the one who prays three times a day? We need to spend time in our Bibles. How many chapters? You see, there are application differences that are not spelled out in the Bible, but there are a whole bunch of things that are that some seem to think "are not salvation issues."

Pay close attention to what you have heard. Not doing this leads us to being sloppy and missing too many things. A child who dresses himself might not pay close attention and his shirt is buttoned crooked. He missed

lining up a button with one button hole. It doesn't look right. Not paying attention when you park your car will put your car over the parking line and into two spots. Not paying attention to your check book may cause you to bounce some checks. Not paying attention to your health may result in some very serious issues. Not paying attention to your kids, may cause you to lose them, especially spiritually.

The verse says to pay close attention to what you have heard. Look carefully in the Bible. In doing this, you find some things that you always assumed but are not actually there. For instance, my wife asked me the other day for the verse that said Noah preached for 120 years. Simple, it's in Peter I told her. She said, no it's not. It says he preached but not for 120 years. I've always heard that. I have used that. I began looking closer and the Bible never actually says that. One assumes that Noah preached the whole time he built the ark but that's not a given. Maybe he only preached eighty years? Maybe twenty years? Maybe just shortly before the flood came? Matthew 24 says concerning the people in Noah's day that "they did not know until the flood came and took them away." If Noah had been preaching all that time, why did they not know? Pay close attention.

Here is my short list of some things that we ought to pay close attention to:

- We ought to pay close attention to our attitudes. We can get negative, sour and sassy sometimes. We tend to complain more than we thank. We see the faults in others more than our own faults. We can be hard on others but give ourselves a pass. Listen to what you are saying. Pay close attention.
- We need to pay close attention to the wellbeing of our souls. Are we growing and getting stronger or are we simply maintaining? Are we more bored than excited spiritually? Are we pushing ourselves to get down to the church house? Do we look forward to opening the Bible? Do we like learning? How are we doing spiritually? Pay close attention.
- Pay attention to your marriage. Notice things. Is your mate lonely? Are you spending too much time away from each other? Is your mate dropping hints but you are not picking up on them? Is your marriage stronger or weaker? Do you have doubts and second thoughts? What are you doing to show your love? What are you doing to make your mate feel so glad that they married you? Pay close attention. Don't forget your anniversary. Mark it down. Remember it. Don't forget birthdays. Details matter. Pay close attention to each other.
- We must pay close attention to what the Bible says. Notice words. Notice what those words mean. Notice the order of those words. Those details matter in salvation. Where does the Bible put baptism, before or after forgiveness? Pay close attention. How does a church raise money? Pay close attention. What can a church do with that money? Pay close attention. Who does God allow to divorce? Pay close attention. Who can serve as elders? Pay close attention. Many of the fusses in church come from people who have not paid close attention. They have an agenda. They have their own thoughts and ideas. Pay close attention.
- Pay close attention to your church family. Notice those around you. Notice who's missing. Notice those who seem to be struggling. Notice those who seem to be burdened. We are connected and we need each other. Pay attention, close attention. Be there for one another. Pray for one another.

Paying attention means focus. It means not being distracted. It means keeping your eyes on the road. It means measuring twice before you cut. It means looking into the eyes of someone else. It means being honest with yourself.

Pay close attention. How are you at doing that? Do you see what's going on in your world? Your family? Your heart? Details matter. Listen to what your teenagers are saying. Hear what is being preached. Consider what the Bible is saying.

Pay close attention. It matters!

Roger Shouse