



# 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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***Isaiah 1:11*** *“What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?” says the Lord. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; and I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats.’”*

Israel had a problem. They had irritated God and now God was fed up. The very sacrifices that God ordered and commanded were now loathsome to Him. It wasn't the sacrifices that was the problem, it was the heart of the people. The text continues with God declaring, "I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me." God said when you pray, I will not listen. He called their offerings "worthless." Israel was going through the motions of worship, but they were not honoring God. Their hearts were far from the Lord. It was just a routine for them. Worse, the time they spent in worship did not change them. They were not the better because of it. They gave no thought that they were standing before the Holy God of Heaven and Earth and that God wanted their attention, love, devotion and hearts. None of that entered their minds. Offer a sacrifice and go back to their wicked, evil ways.

God screamed, "ENOUGH." "NO MORE." What they were doing sickened Him and was a waste of time and took the lives of innocent animals that did nothing.

These solemn words towards Israel reminds us of three powerful thoughts.

First, worship is a gift that must honor God. The Lord will not accept anything we offer Him. Cain learned that lesson. He offered vegetables instead of animal sacrifice. God was not pleased. Aaron's sons learned that lesson. They offered God a strange fire. God consumed them in that fire. During Malachi's day, the nation was offering God crippled and diseased animals. God was insulted. God deserves the best that we can offer Him. God deserves to be honored the way He wants to be, not whatever is convenient for us. Today's church has never learned this lesson. Churches rocking with Van Halen songs, dancing in the isle, sipping their Java, fist bumping and having a good ole' time, are deluded in thinking God loves that stuff. Worship isn't about us, it's about Him. The drive is not to please us, but to please Him. Reverence is out today. Loud, edgy, funny, laid back, casual has taken the place of serious study of God's word and walking according to His ways. I wonder if God screams today, "Enough. Stop it."

Second, worship is always defined by God. That's what got Cain and Aaron's boys in trouble. Had the principle been worship Me any way you can, then veggies and strange fire are in. God never says, 'Surprise Me.' God never says, 'Do something original.' What He does say is what day, what manner and how to worship Him. It's outlined in the Bible. God tells us what He wants.

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Third, worship that leaves the heart out is a waste of time. That was the problem with Israel. It wasn't the wrong sacrifices, it was that they failed to worship. Worship is something that a person does. It's not a spectator sport. It's not the same as sitting in a movie theatre or in the stands of a ball game. In those settings, we sit and watch. Worship involves us. It takes our will, heart, emotions and intellect. It involves all of us. Thus Jesus would tell the disciples to love the Lord with all your heart, mind and soul. Those are the active components of worship. Without those things, we merely go through the motions. Prayers should be real and fervent. Singing ought to be enthusiastic. Preaching needs to be passionate. To be right does not mean one has to be long, boring and dull. Not at all. However, to sit through worship while my mind is in la-la land, to day dream, to text friends, to play angry birds on my phone, may kill an hour, but it also kills worship. It did God no good and it didn't do me any good.

It takes effort to worship God. It takes energy, concentration and a whole lot of "I want to." The stuff that bothers my insides, such as stress, worry, not feeling well, being tired, agitated, irritated, will bother my worship. Satan will try to distract you, make your mind wander, and do anything but worship the Lord. An hour with God changes our outlook. It reminds us that we are not the only one who loves the Lord. It clears things and puts things in the right perspective. It reminds us that God is still upon the throne. Above all, it allows us to see the Lord. The wonderful, wonderful Lord who loves you, wants you and sent the best of Heaven for you. Worship is about honoring God.

It's time folks put God back in the center of worship where He belongs. Magnify the Lord is what the Psalmist wrote. Focus upon God. Stop the "woe are we" club. Kill the complaining. Look beyond those who are serving, and put your attention upon the Lord. Worship is your gift to God. What are you giving Him? The very word, 'worship,' comes to us from the Latin and it means: 'worth-ship.' What is something worth to you?

Value is determined by how rare something is, how much it cost to make or what it means to you. For instance, you may have an autographed baseball. The player who signed it may not be alive today. There is value in that signature. Many mothers have saved those early drawings that their children made long ago. Those stick figured pictures wouldn't get any bids on Ebay. They wouldn't be displayed in any art gallery. But to those moms, those pictures are priceless. It means something to them. Value.

In worship we are saying, "How much does God mean to me?" How we express that is our worship. Words, reverence, emotions, thoughts, obedience, these all play an important role in our expressing to God what He means to us. Worship is our gift to God. There needs to be excellence in worship. Gone are the days of winging it. Gone are the days of just throwing things together without any thought. God deserves better. God deserves our best.

Once we get that, then we see the importance of what we do during worship. Israel never got it. This is why God had enough of what they were doing. Let's be guilty of the same thing.

Give God your best. Give Him your all. "I was glad when they said, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'" (Ps 122:1).

Roger Shouse