



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)

May 22, 2016

Jump Start # 1584

2 Corinthians 11:28 "Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches."

Our verse today is found at the end of a list of things that Paul had endured since he took up preaching Christ. He is telling these things not to brag, but to counter criticism from some Corinthians who did not feel that he was a true apostle. They were chipping away at some of the things he had said. It was not his reputation at stake, but his authority as an apostle. God had granted him the right to not just preach and teach but to bind and loose the commands of Heaven. Paul had said some tough things to the Corinthians. Typical of human nature, they attacked the messenger rather than looking deeply within themselves. This is what the Jewish audience did to Stephen.

Paul contrasts his journey and walk with the Lord to those loud mouth critics. He says that he was in far more labors, far more imprisonments, often in danger of death. Then he pulls back the curtain and shows us what he experienced. It wasn't pretty. Apostles were not esteemed. In other places Paul says, "we are the scum of the earth," and so they were. Beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, dangers from all sorts of people, hungry, thirsty, sleepless, cold-most of us would wonder, "why do this?" Because Christ went to the cross. Why not quit? Because Jesus never did.

We look at this list and then we must hang our heads. Whining preachers complain if they don't have the latest gadget. We sigh because services are a bit long one Sunday. We nearly explode if the air conditioner goes out during services. It's so hard being a Christian, we tell ourselves. It's embarrassing to think that, when we see what this apostle endured. Without this chapter, we wouldn't know much about this. He never brags about these things. He never uses these things as a "I'm better than you are," spirit. He did what he could for the Lord. He was willing to be worn out in service to the Lord. He would not let others stop him.

Then comes our verse. Aside from all of these external things, there were internal things. I tend to think these things bothered Paul more than the externals. The externals were unbelievable. But the internals were the things that were dearest to Paul's heart. The external things were attacks upon Paul's body. The internal things were the wellbeing of the brethren and the churches. He truly loved those young churches. He wanted them to do well. In so many places, they struggled.

(OVER)

- The Galatians nearly devoured each other with Jewish and Gentile issues over the law.
- The Romans struggled with pointing fingers at each other over eating meats
- The Philippians had some who were not in harmony
- The Ephesians had coming trouble through false teachers
- The Corinthians sued each other. They were divided. They misused the Lord's Supper. They looked the other way concerning a serious moral failure among them.

Would these churches make it? Would they destroy each other from within? Paul had serious concerns about these places. His prayers were for these brethren.

The daily concern of the churches was on Paul's mind. Here are some thoughts for us:

1. I wonder if we have a concern about the congregation we are with. Not just a daily concern, any concern. Do we ever think about the people? Do we pray for them? Do we know what is going on? Do we care? Even among leaders, this question must be asked. It must be asked because there too often is little evidence that they care. A caring heart will try to make things better. A caring heart will be involved. Are our prayers only for our self and our friends? Do we pray for the congregation? If no one cares, the place will fall apart.

2. Our interest must primarily be among the people we worship with. We do not have the burdens of all the churches. This is not our responsibility nor our work. Some seem to want to know what is going on everywhere. They are more nosy than anything else. They don't do anything with that information other than tell others. We must be careful about sticking our noses in places that we do not belong. Paul had that authority and right. We do not. Our interests must focus upon where we worship, labor and fellowship.

3. Churches change. Some get stronger, others become weaker. It's not a cycle that all go through. It's based upon the energy, the interests, the commitment and the closeness to the Lord. Churches that seem stuck can become "unstuck" and moving in the right direction, if they put that desire before them and make the right choices. We don't have to accept status quo. We don't have to just continue to coast along. We can make a difference in this generation and the next by stepping things up. Excellence in worship, leaders who shepherd, preachers who are passionate, members who care—that's the key. That will bring about real changes that are Biblical, positive and pleasing to the Lord.

Paul was concerned about the churches. We may be more concerned about a scratch on our car than a soul that is not doing well. Start taking interest in where you worship. Spit shine the place. Have folks over in your home. Encourage the preacher to teach some classes during the day and then go to those classes. Do more. Do better. Don't wait for others, it may never happen.

Daily concern for the churches—leads to daily prayers and daily actions.

Paul went through a lot. I think the internal concern for those churches ate him up the most.

Roger Shouse

