



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 # 1612

Acts 6:1 "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food."

In a perfect world, everyone gets along all the time. The world isn't perfect. Kids fight. Couples argue. Brethren get their feelings hurt. Neighbors sue each other. After the funeral, the grown kids fuss about who gets what. And, then, there is work. Competitive. Hostile. Breaking the rules. Double standards. The expression, "Going Postal," is used to describes a disgruntled employee who returns to the place of work and causes trouble. There have been too many shootings by those who were upset with fellow employees.

Our verse today is surrounded in the atmosphere of conflict. Notice the words: "complaint," "against," "overlooked." There was trouble in paradise. Under the surface you can see fingers being pointed and voices whispering "favoritism." Folks weren't happy.

Through the years, I've learned one clear message. People do not stay unhappy. If they are miserable in a marriage, they leave. If they are unhappy at work, they quit. If they don't like the neighborhood, they move. They switch schools if they are not happy. They refuse to eat at certain places because the last experience wasn't very good. New doctors and dentists are sought out because they don't like the ones they currently have. This is even true of congregations. When one isn't happy, they will look for another place to worship. People do not stay unhappy. They will do what it takes to get happy. Some times those choices takes them to places they shouldn't be. Sometimes their choices are wrong. Those poor choices are some how smoothed out in their conscience by the simple statement, "At least I am happy." Happiness is the bottom line for too many folks today. Happy meals. Happy marriages. And, of course, I wear, happy socks.

The Hellenistic Jews complained about the native Hebrews. Jews living outside of Judea, often speaking Greek instead of Hebrew, is meant by "Hellenistic." The "Natives" lived in Judea and spoke Hebrew. There was a difference. The complaint fell along those lines. The Hellenized widows were neglected. They were overlooked. This is where conflicts quickly turn into declarations of war. Was this done on purpose? They never have liked us? We begin trying to guess motives and reasons why things were done. That journey is most times dark and negative. We start thinking evil of the other group. Mountains are built out of mole hills. We get so worked up that unity is trashed and separate congregations form. The Hellenistic church meeting on the north side of town and the Hebrew church meeting on the south side. This is all too true in too many places.

Notice a few things from this setting.

(OVER)

First, the apostles looked into the matter. What really burns the biscuits is when our complaints are ignored. This makes kids mad. This makes students mad. This makes employees mad. This makes brethren mad. What may seem like no big deal to you, may be a real problem to someone else. The apostles looked into the matter. Not all complaints are legitimate. Some are based upon one person's perspective. He may not have all the facts. Not all complaints mean changes must be made. The kids may complain about bed time. They don't know what parents do. Don't change just because someone complains.

Second, the apostles brought the church into the matter. This was a church problem. They didn't just meet with the Hellenistic folks. The next verse states, "the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples". The church came together. This was not kept a secret. This was not swept under the rug. The complaint was now known by all. Everything was now public. No under the table deals. No secret pacts formed. All cards are on the table. Everyone knows. This kills suspicion and gossip.

Third, I find it healthy that the apostles seemed to know what is going on. Far too often, those in charge are left in the dark. The parents are the last to know. The boss doesn't know. The elders don't know. The complainers often feel that those in charge ought to know. Maybe they should, but too often, they don't. This only upsets the complainers even more. This feeds gossip and more negative thoughts. Here the apostles seemed to know what was going on.

Fourth, it seems that the apostles agreed with the Hellenistic folks. They told the church to pick out seven men who would be put in charge of this task. Why go through that if they thought everything was fine? Obviously, it wasn't. Now, the church was involved. This wasn't the actions of the Hellenistic group vs. the Hebrew group. When you look at the seven names chosen, there is a mixture among them. There are Hebrew names and Hellenistic names. The men picked were good men. They were men of God. They were trusted, loyal and faithful to God. There would be no partiality here, not with this group.

Fifth, this idea found approval with the whole congregation. A bridge was built. Agreement was reached. It wasn't that only the Hellenistic side was pleased. The text states, "the whole congregation." All of them. Hebrew and Hellenistic. All of them. Problem solved. Neglect ended. No more "against" us, language. No more "overlooked." No more complaints.

Sometimes it takes others to help settle a complaint. Sometimes that's the only way. As this section ends, Luke adds, "And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly..." (Acts 6:7). That's impressive. Usually, when there is a lot of huffing and puffing down at the church house, the work stops. Everyone takes sides. Gossip spreads. People forget attitudes. They forget the Lord. Everyone takes up arms and readies themselves for a good ole' fight. And only the Devil smiles through this ugly ordeal. Not here in Acts 6. The complaint didn't split the church. The complaint didn't seem to cause any to quit or leave. In fact, the church grew. They kept spreading the word. The brethren didn't forget what they were supposed to do, nor who they were. It is that spirit that keeps marriages together after a disagreement. It is that spirit that keeps a congregation growing, even when some have complaints.

I wonder if we could learn something from this old passage. Our modern times seems to make us think that if we have a problem with someone else, the world should stop. We tend to feel that complaints are more important than the work God has given us to do.

Conflicts do not have to be the end of us. We can learn from Acts 6 about how to deal with differences. No blood was shed. No loss of life. No one taking the ball and going home. Amazing. They must have seen the big picture, and it wasn't them. They must have really loved one another. I just wonder when this was all over if some of the Hebrews apologized to the Hellenistic folks about overlooking their people. I expect if that happened, the Hellenistic group hugged and forgave the Hebrews. This is how we get along. We are not perfect. There will be bumps and bruises all along the way. We can go home crying or we can be the people that God wants us to be and strive to preserve the unity of the Spirit.

Got a complaint? Who doesn't. Now, what are you going to do with it? Are you going to let it eat you up and ruin your day or let it go or deal with it in the right manner?

Corinthians reminds us that "love is patient...love does not take into account a wrong suffered." Oh, yeah. I forgot about that. Maybe if we thought more of Scriptures than we did how much we feel overlooked, things would be better.

Maybe...

