



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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1 Timothy 6:4 "he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions"

Our passage today takes us to the sewer of attitudes. The words are not kind nor healthy. Here we find, morbid, controversial questions, abusive language, strife and suspicions. These are all connected and characteristic of one who does not abide in the doctrine of Christ. He is going a different direction. He didn't agree with what was taught by Paul. However, that's not enough. He is arguing about words. He is mean in spirit. He is troublesome. This is not an outsider, but someone on the inside who ought to know better. I have run into some of these characteristics before. The guy who loves to stir things up in class. He is interested in controversial questions. He likes to shake things up. He is an outside the box thinker. He doesn't know what is inside the box, but he definitely spends most of his time creating messes and stirring the pot. Some preachers are like this. They forgot that the word "Gospel," means good news. They love to spread bad news. Some of them are really good at it.

The one expression that caught my attention is "evil suspicions." This is nothing more than thinking the worst of a situation and a person. It's reading things into a matter that may not be there at all. For some reason, human nature tends to take us there. We think the worst before we think the best. We hear a story, and immediately, before everything is known, the worst is assumed. Why do we do that? Sometimes we load the cannons and are ready to go off to war, when there isn't a problem at all. Our minds took us there. We thought the worst. Innocent until proven guilty doesn't happen much in the church. We make a guy prove himself innocent before we will believe him.

Thinking evil of someone. Thinking that they are up to no good. Thinking that their motives are impure and not like Christ. Evil suspicions leads to false judging. There is a time and place for judging, but never false judging. We don't judge a book by it's cover. I've learned that the expensive way. I've bought books that had cool titles. The books were duds. I've passed over books with covers and titles that seemed boring only to find out later on that they were great. The same goes for people. A young guy with his shirt tale hanging out, looking sloppy, and we assume he can't even put the right shoe on the right foot. To our amazement, he is not only smart but he is strong spiritually. We assumed the worse.

We can think the worse about many things. The preacher announces that his topic is on giving and immediately, the first thought that crosses our brain is "He's wanting a raise." Why do we think that? An old guy gets up to lead singing, and before he opens his mouth, we just know that the song is going to be slow, slow, slow. To our amazement, it's not. Why did we assume that? One of the elders at church grabs us on the

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way out of the church building and says that he'd like to come by this week and talk with you. Immediately we panic. We think, "What have I done wrong?" All he wants to do is get to know you better and to see how he can help you be stronger in the Lord. Nothing bad. Nothing wrong. Nothing to worry about. Why do we think the worst?

Past experiences with some may be the reason we think this way. You only hear from some people when they want something. So they call, and you know that they need something. It's easy to assume that everyone is that way. They are not. It can be assumed that all doctors overcharge. They don't. It can be assumed that all car dealers will rip you off. Not all of them do. One can assume that all attorneys are dishonest. They are not.

Generalizing also makes us guilty of thinking the worst. Prejudice and fear feeds those suspicious thoughts. We see on the news that some young black men are rioting. We can assume that all black men are like that. Wrong. They are not. You'll find some of the most incredible Christians are young black men. Generalizing about "teenagers." Generalizing about "college kids." We can make the mistake that all people are the same. My last name is of German origin. Occasionally, someone will refer to the "German" in me. The problem is, our family has been in America for more than 300 years. The spelling of our name has changed. There isn't much German in us at all. To say, "Well, you know how Germans are..." Assuming. Suspicious.

So, how do we stop thinking the worst about others? How do we put the brakes on assuming things without the facts? How do we keep from going negative on each other? You have to work at it. You have to divorce yourself of our culture. You have to walk with Christ.

Consider Jesus, who touched lepers, went to the home of a tax collector and chose a tax collector as one of His twelve. We find Him speaking to a woman at a well in Samaria. We find Him not being governed by the social norms of His times. Jesus, who did right, thought the best of others. He wanted the best out of others. He never gave up on others.

It helps applying the golden rule. Do you remember that? How would you want folks to think about you? What would you want others to be saying about you? Would you like folks to talk without knowing the facts? Would you like to be tried and executed with out being given a chance to say what happened? Things may look bad because we've made it look that way.

It helps believing that someone loves the Lord and wants to do what is right. Look at the person's track record. Have they gone from one suspicious mess to another to another? Or, is this out of the ordinary? Be patient.

It helps allowing God to be God. There are situations in which I never did know what happened. But guess what, I didn't need to know. It wasn't my place. Curiosity can lead to suspicion. That in turn, can lead to thinking the worst. I don't have to have an opinion on every thing that happens. I don't have to get involved. My grandma used to say, "Mind your own bee's wax." I never did understand what that expression meant, other than, don't put your nose where it doesn't belong. Mind your own business. If I pointed the spiritual radar gun at myself as much as I do others, my life would probably be closer to the Lord. We give ourselves a pass on things, while at the same time, we are ready to speed dial the executioner for another's crime. Look to yourself is a common theme in the N.T. We are fast to judge others, but so slow at changing ourselves. Maybe we ought to just pour more attention into ourselves.

When wrong is done, there are proper channels and ways to deal with that. But let's not be so quick to go there until we know wrong has been done. We are a touchy society. You look the wrong way and someone is upset. Someone is always upset. You say the wrong thing. You say the right thing but the wrong way. You say the right thing, but they don't think you meant it. It's enough anymore to just want to stay home. But we can't and we don't. We do not try to offend others, but some will be offended no matter what. They are looking to be offended. We can go out of our way to make things right.

Thinking the worst...do you do that? Does that make you happy? Does that make you feel better? Maybe it's time to get out of the jury box and instead of finding guilt with everyone we encounter, we tried to help folks. People make mistakes. People sin. People need Jesus. We can point fingers or we can help. Two of Jesus' disciples wanted the Lord to allow them to call down fire from Heaven and burn up some people. Can you imagine? Can you imagine Jesus being party to killing people that disagreed with Him? Yet, today, there are many who are still calling for fire from Heaven. Let's put down the matches and extend our hands in love, kindness, forgiveness and help. Isn't that what we'd hope that they would do to us?

Don't think the worst...it will bring the worst out of you.

Roger Shouse