



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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Jump Start # 1655

1 Corinthians 8:13 *“Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.”*

Our verse is the personal conclusion Paul drew concerning the controversy of eating meats on idols. This was a huge problem in the world of those early Christians. It carried major religious concerns. Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 address this topic. This issue became the reason that some Christians were judging and pointing fingers at one another. If a person ate meat that had been sacrificed to a god, then is that person condoning and even promoting idolatry? Some thought yes. Others thought no. It was the cause for some to stumble and their faith was hurt.

Our verse, Paul's conclusion, shows the extent that Paul would go for others. He would do without if it kept others from being harmed. I will never eat meat again, if it causes my brother to stumble. Paul had that "other person" conscience in his heart. He didn't want to offend anyone. He didn't want to hurt anyone.

That attitude and spirit of Paul is missing today. What we find today is people saying, "I have a right to eat meats. If they don't like it, they can go to another church." Or, "Why should I change for someone else. He has the problem with it, not me." Such a different attitude. This modern way of thinking is about self. It doesn't take in others. It leads to some being hurt and bothered. It leads to those who are weak in faith becoming weaker even more.

I will never eat meat again. That's bold. That's easy to say, but that would be hard to do. I'm one who likes meat. I like meat in my salad. I like meat on the grill. I like meat on my pizza. When we go to Cracker Barrel, my wife often gets the veggie plate. Not me. Bring on the meat. To go without meat, not for diet reasons, or health reasons, but by choice, because I love another Christian so much that I do not want to offend them, that's the point. That's extreme. That's fellowship. That's love of others. Could you do it? Would you do it without being told? Would you go kicking and screaming and make a big deal about it to the extent that even though you gave up meat, it still offended and hurt the other because of the big deal you made out of it?

I will never eat meat again comes before "I have a right to." Yes, you may have a right to, but you do not have a right to hurt another Christian. "It's his problem," only justifies you continuing to eat meat. It shows the narrow view you have of your relationship with other Christians and it shows that your feelings and your rights come before them. And, that is the heart of the problem! That has always been the heart of the problem. What I want and what I like comes before others.

(OVER)

Historically, would there have been so many divisions across the country if those wanting to use pianos in worship, applied this passage? Would they have thought, I want it, but I don't want to offend and hurt the faith of others, rather than, if you don't like it, leave.

Think about the touchy subject of social drinking alcohol. Some say it's ok, some say "no." I'm in the "no" category. One of the printing companies we use gave me a bottle of wine at the holidays. It sat in a cabinet for a couple of years. I poured it on some weeds. The weeds died. You invite me to your place for a cook out. You have no problem with social drinking. You think it's ok. At our cook out, you take out a beer. My internal radar is sending out all kinds of alarms. I'm bothered. I'm debating whether I ought to say something, leave or remain quiet. My demeanor changes. I'm bothered. My problem, you think. I don't agree with your conclusions, you think. It's my house, I can do what I want, you think. Get over it, you think. And you continue to drink. Do we fail to see what Paul is saying here? Do we fail to think I shouldn't do this? Do we fail to apply, "I will never eat meat again." Paul didn't say, "I will never eat meat in front of that guy again." He said I will never eat meat again. Period. It's over. Done. Why? Why should I change what I want and what I think is right because of someone else? Why am I allowing someone else to dictate my life? Why am I having to give up something for someone else? What's next? They don't like my car? Do I have to sell it? There will always be someone who doesn't like something. This line of thinking, keeps a person eating the meat.

The issue was beyond dislike. It involved the hurting of one's influence and the hurting of another's faith. I may not like the way you comb your hair, but it's not going to dent my faith. The way you park your car may annoy me, but that won't affect my worship and our walk together in Christ. I may not like where you sit in the church building. I may not like the fact that you rarely shave. I may not like your choice of socks. None of those things are going to crash my faith. Eating meats did. Drinking socially can. Other things do.

Am I willing to be big enough to give up something so that another will be secure in their faith and make it to Heaven? That is what this is all about. Paul had the right to eat meats. But if he continued, and someone in their skewed thinking believed that Paul was connected to idols, may even start practicing idolatry and lose their soul, what good is that. What good is it that I do something that causes another to lose their soul?

The first step of discipleship is to deny self. That means it is no longer about me any more. That means I will put others first. That means the kingdom always comes before what I feel like doing or what I want to do. That means I will surrender my right to do something for the sake of the kingdom.

Never eat meats again...better to do that and enjoy Heaven with your fellow Christian than to know you ate all the hotdogs you wanted, but in the process he gave up his walk and lost his soul. Are you willing to let another lose their soul over a hotdog? How about a glass of wine? How about some other practice?

Never eat meats again...Could you do it? Can you do it?

Roger Shouse