



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 # 1713

Ephesians 4:32 "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

Here in our verse today, the apostle is opening up the heart of a Christian, much like an old watchmaker and he reveals the inner workings of our character. This is what makes us "tick" the way we do. These words here are relationship words. We are kind toward others. We are tender-hearted toward others. We forgive others. You'll notice, that nothing is said about how the "others" are toward us. That doesn't seem to matter. We are this way. This is golden rule stuff.

Kindness will set the tone to how we talk to others. Kindness will smooth the rough edges to our tone. Kindness reaches out and is helpful. Some enjoy telling others "the truth," because it gives them a reason to walk all over the feelings of others. "I simply told them the truth." Really? Did you forget kindness?

Kindness grows out of a tender heart. Tender seems weak and soft to some. The ego driven male wants to be aggressive, tough and has no place for tenderness. Such a person will find it hard to be kind. A kind person has a tender heart. When this is missing, family and friends suffer. Feelings are hurt. A church wants shepherds who are tender hearted. The wounded need caring hearts, especially emotionally and spiritually. A tender heart means one cares. A tender heart listens to a person's story. A tender heart is there to comfort. The complaint, "No one cares," is the sad reality of our times. Families do not care. The church does not care. No one cares. This can make a person bitter, mean and untrusting of others. The way you deal with this is to be the one who cares. You have a tender heart. You have a heart that can be touched and is affected by others. Compassion stems from a tender heart. When the disciples were caught in that terrible storm on the sea, they woke Jesus up with the plea, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" They didn't say, "Do you KNOW that we are perishing?" Nor, "Can you KEEP us from perishing?" They asked, "Do you not CARE?" Of course He did. One of the hymns we sing is, "Does Jesus care?" The chorus reminds us, "O, yes He cares, I know He cares..."

Paul then adds, forgiving each other. Forgive just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Paul like to use the "just as" expression in Ephesians.

- Walk in love, just as Christ also loved you (5:2)
- Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church (5:25)
- For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church (5:29)
- No longer walk just as the Gentiles also walk (4:17)

(OVER)

Forgiveness is hard. It means someone has hurt you. Someone was wrong toward you. The natural reaction is to get even, or just cut them off from your life completely. God wants us to forgive them. God wants us to work to restore the relationship. Kind, tender-hearted, forgiving—they complete the picture of how a Christian treats others, including those who have wronged us and hurt us.

Forgive just as God has forgiven us. Have you ever thought about that statement? How has God forgiven you? That's the model. That's what He wants us to follow.

First, God forgives us completely. He doesn't leave things hanging over our heads. He doesn't remind us over and over of how we disappointed Him. It's gone. It's gone for good. It's gone forever.

Second, God forgives us often. Have you ever thought about how many times in your life God has forgiven you? 100 times? 1,000 times? A million times? We typically end every prayer with a statement asking for forgiveness. Can you imagine God putting a limit or cap on forgiveness. Imagine God saying, "I'll give you 100. After that, you are on your own." He doesn't do that. Jesus told Peter to forgive 70 x 7. God beats that easily. God never says, "Here we go again." God never says, "Again?" Forgive like God.

Third, God wants to forgive us. He doesn't owe us forgiveness, nor does He have to forgive us. It's a choice. He wants to. Can we forgive like that? Or, are we the other way? Do we say, "I guess I have to forgive you." And we do so with reluctance. God is not that way. God doesn't bring up what we have done in the past. Can you imagine at the age of 40 or 50, God reminding you of what you did when you were a teen? Oh, boy. He doesn't do that. We do. We claim we forgive, but we put a book marker on that page so we can return to it easily. We like to remind the person how they failed us. We use this over their head as if they are indentured servants to us. We use it to demand favors from them. Is that how God treats you? Is that how you are forgiven by the Lord?

Fourth, when God forgives, the relationship is restored. We are not second class citizens. The story of the prodigal is classic example of this. The wrong prodigal came home to a feast, a ring, robe and sandals. He wasn't shown the door, but rather, the dinner table. He wasn't escorted off the premises, but embraced by his father. The story ended better than he had imagined. He was hoping, at the best, to be treated like a servant. His bed would have been in the barn. He would stand behind his father and brother and feed them. He would eat alone. That's what he was hoping for. It was so much better than he had dreamed. Is this how we treat those who have been forgiven by us? Or do we say, "I forgive you, but you better not show your face around here any more?" Is that how God treats you?

A few final thoughts on forgiveness.

It takes both parties to restore a relationship. Had the prodigal never returned home, the relationship could not have been restored. Both parties must come together for a relationship to be repaired and healed.

I can forgive a person who has never said that they are sorry. Many disagree with me on this. Some say, God doesn't do that. He demands that we repent before He will forgive. God has much more at stake than I do. Now, if you never say that you are sorry, the relationship may remain damaged and hurt, but I can let the pain of what you have done to me be gone. The alternative to not forgiving is found in the previous verse. Paul says let bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice. Those are the actual feelings we have when we have been hurt by someone else. We will either forgive, or be bitter. We will either forgive or be angry. Bitterness and anger will eat us up. They will consume us. We will tell others about what has happened to us. We can't seem to move on past the hurt. So, there we sit, angry and bitter, waiting and waiting for the person to say he is sorry. He controls the situation. If I will not forgive until he is good and ready to apologize, then he continues to hurt me. He continues to ruin me. I don't believe that. I can forgive. I can let it go. I can let the anger, the bitterness and ill feelings go. I can be kind, tender-hearted and forgiving. Should he apologize? Yes. If I forgive him, does that mean he's right with God? No. He must seek forgiveness with God. But I have stopped the bleeding and the pain in my heart.

I have known far too many brethren, with nearly a smile on their face, saying, "I don't have to forgive until he apologizes." You get the impression, that they hope they never apologize. You get the idea that they are glad that they don't have to forgive. It seems that they have found a green light to be mean, ugly and nearly hate the other person. Jesus' turning the cheek...going the extra mile...giving your shirt as well as your cloak...and loving your enemy just isn't mentioned much by this "I don't have to forgive" group. The Lord's example upon the cross when He prayed, "Father, forgive them...", and more so, His simple words in that

model prayer, "If we do not forgive, neither will we be forgiven," ought to make us rethink this whole idea. From the Disney movie, Frozen, we must "Let it go."

Kindness, tender-hearted and forgiving-that's the pace we set in our journey in life. What will trip us is when we make exceptions and then we are only kind to some. We become tender to some. We forgive only some. It's those who are not among the "some" that makes our light not shine so bright.

Kind...tender...forgiving.

Can you do it? Can you be that way? God is counting on you. God is expecting that.

Roger Shouse