



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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Romans 2:21 "you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?"

Consistency is one of the thoughts that comes from our verses today. Paul, in writing about the Jews, shows how they were good to say one thing but they failed to listen to what they were saying. They didn't do what they were telling others. They didn't practice what they preached. Their words and their own actions didn't match. They talked the talk but didn't walk the walk. Very pointedly Paul says, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

There are some lessons we can take from Paul's words:

First, it is easier to tell others what to do than it is for you to do it yourself. It's easier to preach a sermon than it is to live what you preached. Telling others is a lot easier than fixing your own life. We can often see what others need to change more than we can see what we need to change. We find safe and ready excuses to keep us from changing, all the while, expecting the other person to drop what he is doing and make immediate changes. I suppose this is why judging is such a problem among Christians. We are so quick to pull out the radar gun and point it at others but never look in the mirror ourselves at our own failures. There is a place for judging. But too often, it is out of place and our critical words are not offered to help but rather to crush and destroy.

Second, talking is always easier than doing. That's true in about all areas of life. We can talk a good game, but putting that in practice, that's tough. Consider the subject of dieting. Easy to talk about it. Tough to do it, especially when you have a donut in your hand. The same goes for saving money. It's easy to map out a savings plan on paper, but the impulsive buying at the store, kills that budget. It's easier to talk about what we need to do than it is to do it. Churches can be like that. They can spend quarter after quarter studying every aspect of evangelism. They can have all the answers in case someone asks a question. They learn how to answer every "ism" from Calvinism to Premillennialism. Some even have role playing just to practice. But sooner or later, break from huddle and play the game. Just go do it. Evangelize. Invite. Engage in conversations. Talking is easy. Get to doing it. Making plans can be the same way. Plan this. Plan that. Map everything out. Sooner or later, you have to start doing things. Talking is always easier than doing.

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Third, consistency is hard. When we are not consistent, people notice. This is where the charge of being a hypocrite comes in. It is easier to be a Christian on Sunday than it is the other days of the week. It is also easier being a Christian when around other Christians, than when you are by yourself or surrounded by those who are not Christians. It's easy to think about God at worship. It's hard to remember when at a ballgame, in the middle of a meeting at work, or engaged in a political discussion with someone. When we forget, we often make mistakes. It is during those moments that we say things that we shouldn't. We forget. Then we have to apologize. Our lights didn't shine so bright during those moments. It is at those times that our influence and impact with others takes a hit. A month of church services can be lost in a few minutes of inconsistency. Someone sees us losing our temper at work or sees us being dishonest in selling things, their impression of us changes. They wonder about everyone else at church. Are they all like this? It's hard to bounce back when you have been inconsistent. It hurts the most at home. Kids are smart. They see things. They see us in worship but then they see us at home. Sometimes those images are not the same. Sometimes they wish the person at worship came home rather than the other person we appear to be. I knew a man who served as a shepherd in the church and he often came home and literally beat his wife. Those hidden secrets came out. It sure changed my impression of him. I couldn't move past the idea that he could stand before the people of God and teach and then at home strike his wife. Inconsistent and wrong.

How does one remain consistent? How does a person act the same all the time? It was Wesley who said about preachers, "some are so noble that they should never leave the pulpit; and some, once they leave the pulpit are so vile that they should never return to the pulpit." He was driving at consistency.

Consistency is a faith issue. That's where it begins. A person believes in Christ and loves the Lord. The devotion is not to the church, but to Christ. Everywhere he goes, he is a Christian. Every day of the week, he is a Christian. There is never a time and never a place when he can forget that he belongs to Christ. That spirit and that behavior may cost him a sale. It may cause him to lose a job. It may lead to losing some friends. But even if it does, he belongs to Christ. Always!

From that, a person must always be thinking spiritually. Always. Set your mind on things above-is more than a great motto for a church bulletin, it is the way it is for the consistent Christian. He is always thinking spiritually. Every action. Every person. Every move is measured by those thoughts. He considers his influence. He considers his reputation. He considers how to shine his light for the Lord. He considers consequences. Little, if any thing, is done spur of the moment, spontaneously. He is thinking. Before he raises his hand in a Bible class to offer a comment, he has thought through what he wants to say. He makes sure that his comment won't hurt others. Before he sends texts, hits the like button on Facebook, he is thinking about how that will be perceived, first by Christ, and then by others. He is the same on Sunday as he is on a Friday night.

The opposite of consistency is someone who is two-faced. They may be one way to some and a different way to another. The chameleon is a great example of this. Sitting on something dark, his skin looks dark. Next to something light and he turns lighter. He is always changing to blend in with the surroundings. That works great for chameleons, but it's a terrible way to live as a Christian. It won't work. It will backfire and he will be so miserable. Too much guilt to do what his worldly friends are doing, but too much world in him to do everything that the Christians are doing. He is a man without a country. Miserable on both ends. He is inconsistent.

Do you listen to what you are saying? Are you walking as you talk?

Consistent-the Jews weren't. Are you?

Roger Shouse

