



# THE EXHORTER

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*“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40*

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***Psalms 133:1 "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!"***

Unity-the ability to get along, blend together, work together and be one is a huge aspect of the N.T. church. We find expressions such as "one mind," "one voice," "striving together," as essential elements that made the church functional and practical. The Ephesians were told to "be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit." Getting along isn't easy. It isn't easy at home. It isn't easy in a nation and it isn't easy in a congregation.

The N.T. shows the strains and the difficulties of unity. Jews and Gentiles blending together created some unique issues that had to be worked through and thought out. Differences such as eating meats sacrificed to idols tested this unity. Some didn't do well with this unity. The Galatians were warned about "biting and devouring one another." Diotrephes refused to accept some brethren that were sent from the apostle John. He put them out. The Corinthians were divided and splintered in many areas. It affected the worship, specifically the Lord's Supper and it drove some to lawsuits against each other.

Getting along is hard. Take a long road trip with the kids and you'll find this out. It's a challenge today to get believers to be one. Everyone has their own thoughts about how things ought to be done. We recently went through three huge unity testers where I worship. We added on to the building. We changed the order of worship. We hired a new preacher. Everyone has thoughts about each of those. It's hard for a husband and wife to agree on what color to paint the walls at home. Imagine trying to set the course with 400 people involved. You will never please everyone. However, unity can still prevail.

Here are some things I have learned about unity:

First, unity begins with an attitude and a spirit that wants to be together. Take a kid and send him to summer camp, and if that kid goes kicking and screaming and has his mind made up that he won't like it, there is a strong chance that we won't like it. But talk it up. Send some friends with him. Get his attitude changed and the results will change. "I don't like it," works well if you live by yourself in an apartment. But if you want to do anything with someone else, you have to learn to get along. This is learned in dating. This is the key to marriage. I've watched many shows with my wife that I would never watch by myself. My wife wanted to watch them and I wanted to sit by her, so I watched them. In fact, I not only learned some things, they weren't all that bad. In fact, I grew to like some of her shows. That's what the spirit of unity will do to a person. If your mind is made up that I don't like something down at church, you probably won't like it. But if you have the spirit that says, "I want to sit with others," you may grow to like things.

**(OVER)**

Second, the very nature of the word unity implies and means getting along with others. If everyone did what I want to do, there is no unity, they are doing what I want. Unity is about getting along. This is lacking in our times today. Society demands, you must accept me, but I don't have to accept you. That's nothing more than selfishness. That will always blow up and it will always fail. It kills a marriage. It destroys friendships. It severs a church. Get along. It may not be my idea, but if it's not wrong, why can't I give it a try? What hurts many churches today is that there are too many of us who are selfish and we have to have our way or we pitch a fit. The expression, "I'll take the ball and go home," is exactly how some feel and behave. Why should you always have your way? Why should I always have my way? When dealing with things down at the church house, two things must come first in our thinking.

(1) Is it right with the Lord. Unity around error is wrong. Everyone wanting a golden calf doesn't mean golden calves are right. The Lord has to be thought of first. Is it Biblical? Is this consistent with the Scriptures? Is this what we are supposed to be doing? That must be the first thought every time.

(2) Next, what's best for the group. When you are trying to unify a group, the group as a whole must be thought about. Where are they spiritually? What is best for them spiritually? What will help them the most? This is what works at home. Maybe dad feels like going golfing on Saturday, his day off. Sounds like fun. But for the group, the family, it may be best to take the kids to the park. Dad may not feel like going to the park, but it's not about him. It's what's best for the group.

Third, unity moves beyond attitudes and a spirit, to actually participating together. It's one thing to say, "I'll go along with it," but then you never show up or you never are involved with things. On our Saturday illustration. Dad could send mom and the kids to the park and he goes golfing. Everyone does what they want and all is happy, except, there was not togetherness with dad. He didn't participate with the family. He did what he wanted to do. When the kids are older and it's time to visit grandma, they may remember that. They may say, "You go. We don't feel like it." Cooperating. Participating. Engaged. Being there. Being there when the church has special meetings and classes. Being there because the shepherds have designed something that will help us. Being there, because unity demands that. Unity is more than an attitude. It's doing things together. It's being together.

Fourth, unity is based upon decisions made by trusted shepherds or elders. Men who truly have their heart set on helping the church have a track record of making important decisions that will benefit all of us. Their history has proven this. They have not done things without pouring hours and prayers into projects. Now this may be a problem in some places. Maybe the shepherds have not proven themselves. Maybe the members do not trust the shepherds. Maybe that relationship is not healthy and good. If that is the case, then there will be a struggle with unity.

Have you ever seen what happens when unity is missing in a church? It's not a pretty picture. You have subgroups that talk with each other and they talk about the other people. Folks don't stick around long after services. They peel out as soon as the amen is said. Why stick around, there is nothing in common with each other. That's the thinking when unity is missing. Activities, projects and special meetings are usually a bust. Few show up. No one supports these things. It's do the minimum and nothing more. It's get through worship as fast as we can and get out of there. No one greets others. You can feel the tension. You can tell these people do not like each other. There are constant battles and friction going on under the surface. There are attempts to undermine the leadership and other attempts to take over. It's ugly, messy and lacking Christ.

How pleasant it is, our verse tells us, for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is good. It shows the world that we are different, but Christ binds us together. It shows the world that we can get along. It is powerful. It is strengthening. It is encouraging. It is helpful. It bugs the daylights out of Satan. It is what God wants.

So, it comes down to you and me. Do you want to be united? Can we be team players? Can we cooperate? Can we give and take? Does it have to be your way? Does it have to be my way? Can we see how good and pleasant it is when we dwell together? Instead of frowning, let's smile. Instead of crossing our arms, let's hug. Instead of sitting alone, let's sit together. Instead of each going our own way, let's walk together. Can we talk? Can we listen? Can we be together? Can we share? Can we learn from each other?

Unity-it begins with you and me wanting it.