



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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Galatians 6:1 "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted."

Within the N.T. system, especially the church, God has a means of accountability, support and help. Everyone matters. This verse today is just one example of how a congregation helps their own wounded. We shouldn't abandon anyone. We should never shoot our own wounded, yet that's exactly how some feel. A mistake was made. Someone chose Satan over God. A sin was committed. Regret, guilt and truth caused this person to stop and turn back toward God. Like the prodigal long ago, sense was found and forgiveness was offered by the Lord. But in some cases, the person still does not come back to the congregation they left. They have made great recovery with the Lord, but not with the church. Why?

Too often, the person feels the church will not be as forgiving as God was. The penitent one fears all the questions, finger pointing, blame and wagging tongues. God is good, but the people can be a real mess. So, the person stays away. They try to journey on without the church. What most times happens is that the person will either return back to the world or they will find a compromising church that accepts them but does not teach all the truth.

Our verse today is layered with lessons that we must never forget. How shameful it is when someone wants to do right and come back but they fear the church. Something is terribly wrong when that happens. Churches that act that way are just as wrong as the choices the person first made when he left the Lord.

Let's see some things here:

First, Paul's words involve a Christian who is caught in any trespass. It doesn't matter the sin. Christians make the wrong choices sometimes. Backseat driving would say, "You shouldn't have been with the wrong people." Yes, that's true. "You should have been stronger spiritually." Yes, that's true. Saying these things, AFTER the fact, only worsens how someone feels. We sin. We all do. Some are caught up in a trespass. Their sin pulls them away from Christ.

Second, attempts are made to bring back those who have wandered off. "Restore such a one," means that you do not give up on them. You don't cut your losses and write them off. Nor does it mean that you forget about them until they come back on their own. A caring church wants everyone to go to Heaven. The wayward was not restored on his own. Rather, spiritual brethren led him back to God.

Third, Paul instructs those "who are spiritual" to do this work. Not everyone who sits in the church building is spiritual. Obviously, the person who was caught in the trespass wasn't thinking very spiritually. This work isn't for everyone. Not everyone will do this in the proper spirit nor with the right motives. The wayward is not brought back kicking and screaming against his wishes. He is not threatened into right behavior. Strong armed tactics are not to be used here. Not everyone is good at plain talking with the right spirit. The "spiritual" ought

to be the shepherds of the church. If they are not spiritual then they should not be in the role of leading the church.

Fourth, Paul adds the reminder that all of this is to be done in the spirit of gentleness. That word is found often with correction. You are not beating this person verbally or emotionally. You are gentle. You don't allow little boys into a store with a lot of glass items on the shelves. Something will probably break. They are not the most gentle. We must be gentle with the person's feelings. We must be gentle with their family. This implies the road of restoration takes some time. Patience and learning are a must. One who is in a hurry or who wants to "fix" this quickly, will run over people's feelings and often make things worse. Gentle. Carefully. Talking and a whole lot of listening. Explaining and building faith. It does little good to get the person back if he hasn't learned what happened nor made any changes. Without some real changes in his life, he will make the same mistake again. So, the process of restoration involves much more than just getting a person back, it is getting them to see and to learn better.

Fifth, Paul concludes with, "looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted." The spiritual one who is helping the wayward Christian is listening to himself as he talks. He realizes that the two could switch seats and it would be the spiritual one who messed up and made the mistakes. It's hard to talk to someone about their marriage, without thinking about your own marriage. Do you listen to your own advice? It's hard to talk to someone about purity and not think about your own purity. Looking to yourself-makes you realize that you are not above making the same mistakes and the same wrong choices. Often, the one who is now spiritual once sat in the very seat where the wayward now sits. Wrong choices. Wrong friends. Wrong thinking. But, someone restored. Someone cared. Someone was gentle. And now, that former wayward person is spiritual. And now, he is helping find others who made spiritual mistakes that he did years before. He knows what it is like. He knows what it took to get back. Open and honest communication will help the person to return.

The perception that some have is that the church is perfect. It's not. It follows the perfect One, Jesus. What hinders the wayward person is that now everyone will know what he did. Everyone will know the mistakes and sins he committed. Everyone does right but this one guilty person. That's not the case, but that often is the thinking.

It helps being honest. It helps being truthful. We struggle. Some days are better than others. Some days we are pretty strong and hitting on all cylinders. We could spit right in the devil's eyes on those days. But, there are other days. Wrong choices. Wrong attitudes. We messed up. We cursed when we were angry. We had a drink with some friends. We gossiped. We lied to get out of trouble. We got pulled over by the police. We got in trouble at work. Our spouse doesn't want to talk to us because of something insensitive we said. We looked at porn. The righteous are not always angels. We need Jesus. There are things we are ashamed about, embarrassed about and promise to never do again. I've got my list. Admit it or not, you have your list. The forgiveness of Christ has cleaned that dirty laundry. God's grace has allowed us yet another chance. We learn. We do better. We press on.

It doesn't help those who are weak and new to believe that we are perfect people. We are not. Sometimes that false idealistic view makes some believe that they can never live up to that. Why try, they proclaim. I can never be as good as they are. I've heard that. The truth is, it's Christ who is perfect and good. We are all journeying together. We need each other. That's the heart of this verse. It's not you go and get fixed and straightened out then you can come and be with us. That arrogant spirit destroys this passage and it's not even correct. That arrogant spirit comes from those who are not as spiritual as they believe and are in the need of God's mercy and grace as much as the wayward one.

It is so easy to stand beside the prodigal's older brother and refuse to go into the celebration. His mean spirited heart was cold and closed. He was just as lost at home as the prodigal was in the far country. The prodigal returned. We never know if the older brother ever did.

To keep that from happening to us, follow Paul's words in this verse. That's the answer. Seek out. Be spiritual. Restore. Be gentle. Look to yourself, because the same could happen to you. A caring church is a restoring church. A caring church has plenty of band-aids for all the hurting hearts that are trying to do better.

How does one change the temperature of a congregation? It starts with one. It starts with you. Be the loving person who cares. Put down the sword. Tone down your words. Say a prayer. Go help someone come back to the Lord. You may need it next time!