



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 # 1942

Ephesians 4:16 "from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

I was talking to someone recently about the congregation where they attended. There is a lot of movement in that church. It's near a military base and every couple of years new faces show up and others leave. College congregations are like this. Lots of young people in August. They stick around for three or four years. They graduate and move away. New faces show up the next school year. In just about every congregation you see some shifting that takes place. People move in and people move out. Some marry and move away. Some pass away. Those that are in charge of the directory are always having to make changes.

The movement within a congregation made me think of this verse today. Unlike sports, where fans watch and athletes perform, our function in a congregation is that we all participate. We all have a part. We all are to add. Two expressions show this in our verse today:

- Every joint supplies
- Proper working of each individual part

These verses were written long before modern gas engines, which really illustrate this point. Spark plugs, pistons, gasoline, drive shafts, wheels—they are all engineered to work together. When one doesn't, your car may break down along side of the road. It's true of engines. It's true of our physical bodies. Oxygen, blood, lungs, heart—they all work together. They have different roles and different functions but they are connected and influence each other. Each part supplies. Each part is needed.

The same ought to be true in a church. But too often, it's not. We look for a church that's friendly. We want a church that is growing. We want a church that is strong. We want a church with great leadership and vision. Who doesn't. Those things are important. They add so much to our spiritual progress. In a large city where there may be several congregations, people will visit around until they find one that they feel will help them. Nothing wrong in all of this. We ought to want a congregation that is friendly, growing and strong.

(OVER)

However, what are we supplying? What are we adding? How have we helped the church? A couple worshipped for a few years. They decided to leave and worship with another congregation. Looking back, the question is asked, "What did they do for us?" "What did they bring to us?" "How did they help us?" Beyond showing up on Sunday morning, giving some money, and not causing any trouble, is there anything more that was added to the church? Is that the extent of our "supplying" and the "working" of the individual part?

Have you noticed, especially in the way God made nature, that created things are made to both give and take. A tree takes in sunlight and rain. In turn, leaves are made which fall to the ground and helps the soil. Giving and taking. A cow eats grass. His dung, or cow patties, as some call them, fertilizes the ground. The cow gives milk. Give and take. It's a cycle. Everything is connected and everything feeds off of each other.

How have I helped the church? Have we thought those thoughts? Have we looked at things that way? We want the church to be there for us when we have needs. Some have caused heartache and headaches for the church. But how has the church become better because of you? I believe it's time to put some thought there. We want the church to be spiritual. We want the church to be Scriptural. But it seems like all of this is one directional. I want. I want. I want the church to be. What am I doing for the church?

How you can help the church. Here's some ideas:

1. Be engaged. You do this by being there. You do this by having a great attitude. You do this by praying for the church. You do this by knowing what is going on and doing what you can. Send cards. Make phone calls. Visit others. Connect.
2. Be supportive. You do this by speaking well of the church. You do this by loving your church family. You do this by inviting friends to worship with you. You do this by devoting your time, money and energy to the things going on. If the church is having a special series of meetings, be there. If the church is needing some extra money, roll up your sleeves and pitch in. If the church needs volunteers to teach, clean, help out, get your hand up in the air and be one of the firsts to sign up.
3. Be an encourager. Sing passionately. Pray fervently. Carry a smile. Don't talk about yourself. Be a listener. Be a hugger. Be one who takes the food, invites families over, has the teens in your house, helps pick people up. Praise more than complain. Compliment more than whine. Be the spark plug in that church. Be the sunshine that lifts the spirits of others.

I've known folks just like this. When they are out of town, it's noticed. The place just doesn't seem the same. They add so much. But there are others who could drop out of sight and hardly anyone would notice. The reason? They aren't adding much. They aren't doing their part to supply. Their individual part hasn't worked in a long time. It's time to brush off the rust, get out the spiritual WD-40 and get those parts working again.

What am I doing to help the church? We have asked about the church for so many years, it's about time for the church to ask us, "What are you doing?" "What are you doing to help the church?"

If you can't really answer that other than attending, maybe it's time to really look at your spiritual life and the faith you have. Maybe it's time to stop always being a taker and start giving and supplying. Maybe I'd see things differently if I understood and was a part of this amazing cycle of giving and taking. All taking without much giving leads to selfishness. In a child, we'd say the kid is spoiled. Some say, 'spoiled rotten.' Can't the same happen spiritually?

What are you doing to help the church?

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)