



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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1 Timothy 6:4 "he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions"

Our passage today is the dark description that Paul gives of those who reject the doctrine of the N.T. Without the guidance of N.T., they roam free into areas of trouble, doubt and negativism. Relationships are ruined because the Gospel of mercy, grace and forgiveness has been abandoned. Instead of being united, these folks turn on each other. Thinking that they are pursuing a better way by rejecting the N.T., they have been fooled by Satan and their lives are miserable and messy. Anger, finger pointing, blame become a regular part of their lives.

Among these descriptive words we find, "evil suspicions." The KJV uses the words, "evil surmising." Thinking the worst. Guilty before proven innocent. It often works this way. Word gets back about someone and immediately the worst is assumed. No thought is given to their faith, history of walking with the Lord or finding out what really happened. The worst is expected. The evil thinkers hope for the worst. They love a good scandal. They rise to the occasion when there is some mud to throw and some juicy gossip to spread. Reputations are tarnished. Character is assassinated. Rumors spread. Tongues wag.

These thoughts came out of our study last evening about Joshua. The battles were over. The land was divided up. Cities of refuge were established. It was now time to settle down and live. Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, were to take their place on the other side, the east side of the Jordan River. The rest of the nation was on the other side of the river. These three tribes feared that down the road, generations later, they may not be considered a part of Israel. Future generations may look upon them as a neighboring nation. To prevent that, these three tribes built a replica of the altar. The altar was with the tabernacle in Shiloh. It was upon the altar that sacrifices were made. There was one altar, that is until now. Word reaches Israel what these three tribes have done. They assumed the worst. They thought they were going to have sacrifices upon them. This was a test of faithfulness. The nation was ready to go to war against these three tribes. It would have been ugly, except a delegation was sent to talk and reason with these renegade tribes.

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It was then found out that this was not to be used for sacrifices. It was not intended for God. It was a reminder that Israel included the three tribes on the other side of the river. Trouble was averted and all ended well. But a great lesson for us.

The Joshua story reminds us to get the facts before we come to our conclusions. What we have heard from others is often not the whole story. Rumors, gossip and evil suspicion still run through many congregations today. Here's a few examples:

- A teen confesses sin and the rumor mill runs overtime guessing what all happened. The worst is assumed.
- A man's name is submitted to be an elder and immediately, people feel compelled to find something wrong with him. When they can't, some make up stuff and assume things without the facts. If not handled carefully and rightly, the man may withdraw his name.
- The elders want to address the congregation and immediately folks try to read between the lines. There is more that is not being said, they believe. The evil suspicions run wild. They try to guess who the elders are really talking about.

Modern media thrives on thinking the worst. I was listening to an "expert" talking about the Austin, Texas bomber. The man had blown himself up as the police narrowed in on him. Little details were known. But this "expert" who lived in another part of the country was certain that the young man had studied the tactics of the famed Unabomber. Did he know that? No. He was surmising. He was assuming. Media does this. Politics does this. The world does this. But God's people don't.

Thinking the worst and assuming wrong is considered not only evil, but characteristic of not following the Gospel of Christ. Don't be ready to go to war until you get all the facts. It's so easy to play the role of the judge, jury and executioner in our minds. We can do this just with the statement, "You'll go to Hell."

Assigning someone to Hell should never be done with a smile on our face, but rather a tear ought to be running down our cheeks. Assigning someone to Hell is not our prerogative. We ought to be doing all we can to show someone Jesus Christ. There was a generation not too long ago that loved to tell people that they were going to Hell. I've run into so many through the years that those words destroyed them. They could never forget them. I was told that I'm going to Hell, someone claims. Most times, that was enough for them to stop trying to find God and to just give up all together. It ruined them on Christianity.

Threats may keep North Korea from launching rockets, but it doesn't change behavior. A person must be shown with the Bible why their behavior is wrong and what they are missing from not following Christ. The very definition of the word "gospel" means good news. It's good news for those who do not have it. It's good news for those who are living with bad news. It's helpful, hopeful and life changing.

Let God be God. Stop thinking the worst. Gather facts. Help by showing that God has a better way. Make disciples of Jesus, not church members.

Now, some may be thinking, 'I wonder what made him write about this today?' 'Must be something going on in that church he attends.' Thinking the worst. Suspensions. Truth be, it was our study of Joshua and what Israel did that prompted this.

Try thinking the best, rather than the worst.

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)