



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 # 2151

Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her"

Someone reached out and said, "I don't like my church. I know that I am supposed to, but I don't." That's honest. It's also troubling. Our verse reminds us that Christ loved the church. In Acts we are told that Jesus died for the church. We ought to and we need to love the church.

Let's peel some layers off.

First, when someone says that they do not like the church, most times they are referring to the congregation that they are a part of. Each congregation has it's own personality, just like a family. Some seem very tight and strict. Some are very warm and laid back. We can follow the same book, the Bible, but our attitudes, seriousness and the way we get about things can be very different.

We must remember that the church is saved people. It's not the building. It's not the programs. It's the people. Sometimes that gets confused. It's easy for someone to come back from vacation, and they've visited a large congregation that is hitting on all the right keys, the place sparkles, there's lots of things to take home, lots of monitors with information, it's an amazing experience. Vacation ends and you return to your home congregation and it doesn't have all those things. It doesn't sparkle. There aren't many different classes offered at the same time. Whatever is being taught in the auditorium, is what you get. Sometimes the kids classes seem like the old one room school house with fifth graders in the same room with high schoolers, simply because there are not enough kids, rooms or teachers. Back home, there isn't a bulletin and if there was, it's not in color. There are no monitors on the walls, flashing information. The lighting seems dim. The place seems old. It crosses your mind that Extreme Makeover ought to branch out and start doing church buildings and you'd like to recommend your place to start with.

Understand, all that glitter, shinny, new techo, stuff is not the church. It takes a ton of money and a lot of people to do all of that and few places are in the position to do that. It's similar to our homes. You can go to a home expo show, or just look at the latest Better Homes and Garden magazine, and come back home depressed because your house isn't like this. Better Homes and Garden really means, better than what I have. But you can get ideas and you can do what you can. Budgets and finances determine what can be done. But at the end of the day, a house is not a home. A home is the love, warmth and atmosphere that we create. A large house can be cold and empty of that and a small apartment can be everything that a family is supposed to be.

So, when a person says, "I don't like my church," don't confuse the stuff and the building with the church. Now, before we leave this, there is a lot of spring cleaning, sprucing up that can make all the difference in the world. There is no reason to worship in a dump. Fresh paint, clean up the landscape, put in brighter light bulbs, put some elbow grease into the place and you'll be surprised how nice it can look. Clean up the tract rack. Pitch things that no one reads anymore. Few people are interested in reading a 20 page tract these days. Get some colorful, to-the-point, tri-fold tracts that are practical, interesting and eye catching. Read our Jump Start book on "The Welcoming Church." It will give you ideas.

Second, the church is saved people. It's the people that make a congregation. The church is a family. I was with some family yesterday. Saw a cousin that I haven't seen in years. The church, like our family, isn't chosen like friends. You don't get to pick out your parents, brothers or sisters. You don't get to pick out your spiritual family either. If they are in fellowship with God then they ought to be in fellowship with us.

Now, comes the touchy stuff. When someone says, "I don't like my church," they may be referring to the people. I don't like the people in my church. Now, we are getting somewhere.

Understand, that we are not all the same. I've been married for a long time to my wonderful wife. She's not like me. I wouldn't have married me. She different. There are things I do that she'd like to change and there are some things that she realizes after all these years, I probably will never change. We are not the same. We have grown to like many of the same things. I go to the symphony on a regular basis now. Would never do that when I was single. Never. Our interests have merged and we find ourselves working like a team on many things. We both have an interest in each other and that has made us like what the other likes. Our food choices remain different. On a recent vacation I ate some octopus. It came with tentacles. It was great. She wouldn't try a one bite. We are different but we have determined to work together, get to know each other and make the other happy. Is it any different in the church? What bugs us often is that a fellow member isn't like us. They sing too loud. They talk too softly. They ask too many questions. They dress weird. They interrupt. They do things that we'd never do. I've seen folks pick their nose, clip their toe nails and pop their knuckles right during services. Some chew gum so loud that their lips smack. And when they talk, you see the gum in their mouth. We can walk away shaking our heads, thinking, what's wrong with those nutty people. They are saved by Jesus. A person can be odd as a duck and still go to Heaven. They can clip nails, pop knuckles and talk all the time in a Bible class and go to Heaven. They can do things that we'd never do, and still be accepted and invited by the Lord.

Think about your family. Think about your marriage. We are not the same and there are things that probably drives us nuts, but we love them because they are family. We've made that commitment. We need to do that with the church. It will require you working at it, but you can do it. If Jews and Gentiles could worship together, you and I ought to be able to get along with each other.

Remember, we are not all at the same place spiritually. It's like driving down a high way. There is always someone behind you and someone ahead of you. Some get the Gospel message better than others. We all come to Jesus with sins, a past and lots of baggage. We must work through what we thought was right. We must weed out so many concepts, ideas and false theology that we assumed was correct. Which means, some are better at forgiving than others. Some understand grace more than others. Some are demanding. Some seem harsh. Some seem to think that they are the greatest example next to the Lord. They're not, but they think they are. This requires a bunch of patience on our part and a whole lot of love. I don't like my church, may mean that there are those who are not kind, and they should be. There are those who are selfish and they shouldn't be. But look at those apostles. They followed Jesus for three years and what a mess they were. They argued about greatness. They lacked understanding and faith. They didn't seem to get it. It took a while. It took a lot of help. So, rather than rolling your eyes at folks, be an example. Help. Show. Teach. Illustrate. You'll have people over and

not only will they never think to invite you to their home, they may never even tell you thank you. Just keep doing it. You'll take some food to someone who has a need. You may not even get all your dishes back. They may not thank you, and worse, they may say, "we've had chicken three times this week." Just smile. Be kind. And, continue to serve. Don't give up. Don't talk about them to others.

Also, remember that you are a work in progress as well. There are things that you do that probably bugs others. You may not recognize it and you may think that you are perfectly normal, but through their eyes it's not that way. You may seem to be a know-it-all. You may seem to be always in charge. It's hard to think that others have to have patience and grace with us as well, but they do. Just like home. Just like in a marriage. It's the same in a congregation.

That's the solution to "I don't like my church." Start liking them. God does. Stop looking for perfection. Work with what you have. If no one is showing hospitality, you be the one. If no one goes to the nursing homes, you go. If no one picks up the building after services, you do it. Instead of waiting for others to come around, you do what you can. Some may notice. Many probably will not. Some may accept your invitation to come to your home, many may not. Keep trying. Don't let the church keep you from Heaven. Don't let others sour your spirit and ruin your attitude. Pray. Change. Look in the mirror. Then, do what you can.

Jesus loves the church. We need to as well. We need each other.

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)
