



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 # 2351

Galatians 2:13 "And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy."

Even Barnabas. What explosive words those are. It was Barnabas who was the great encourager. It was Barnabas who stood up and defended Paul when the Jerusalem church was afraid of him. It was Barnabas who was willing to give Mark a second chance after he deserted them on Paul's first journey. We all would love to have a Barnabas in our lives. What a true friend he was. I tend to think Barnabas smiled a lot. I don't know that, but that's how many encouragers are. You just look at them and they smile. They make you smile because they are smiling. Upbeat. Positive. Seeing the best in others. Hopeful. Never giving up. There are too many gloom and doom folks in the church. All it takes is one Barnabas to get people back to Jesus and the hope of Heaven. You just gotta love Barnabas.

But now on this page of our Bible, it's "even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy." Barnabas and hypocrisy do not belong in the same sentence. Not the encourager. Not Barnabas. It's like the baseball scandal of years ago when some where caught cheating. The famous Shoeless Joe Jackson was one of them. Supposedly, a kid said to him, "Say, it ain't so, Joe." And, when we read this passage, we want to shout, "Say it ain't so, Barnabas." But it was so.

Peter, the first to preach to Gentiles and even defend eating with the Gentiles, now turned on the Gentiles. He feared the Jews. He refused to associate with Gentiles. All that he had said to Cornelius seemed to go away. He was acting as if he was too good for Gentiles. The pressure got to Peter. He followed these prejudiced Jews. And, now, even Barnabas was part of this mess.

Every church has bumps and things that they have to work through. Sometimes our attitudes are not where they need to be and we must correct them. In many ways, Peter was acting like Diotrephes in 3 John. He refused to accept some that John had sent. Here, Peter is refusing to accept Gentiles. Peter was acting as if God was a respecter of persons. The Jews were in and the Gentiles were out and they may never get in. This was a major problem. Paul is the one to correct it. He had spent a long time with Gentiles. He is known as the apostle to the Gentiles. This is not something that we each can have our own opinions on. Either the Gentiles were saved the same as the Jews, or they weren't. There is no neutral or middle ground here. If the Gentiles were out, then Cornelius was out. It also meant that Paul was spreading error, by allowing Gentiles to be saved the same as the Jews.

Paul confronts Peter face to face. An apostle correcting an apostle. There was no shoving, shouting or duel to the end. Paul had God on his side. The discussion that took place in Acts 15, and the events at Cornelius' house, the Lord's promise and even the prophecy way back to Abraham set the standard of what was right. Peter was wrong here. Peter was being a hypocrite. Peter needed to change his ways and his thinking.

(OVER)

Many lessons here:

First, leaders can be wrong. Although Peter was inspired by the Holy Spirit, it did not make him sinless. His choices and his walk had to match the words he preached. Preachers make mistakes. Elders make mistakes. Our judgment can be clouded by the influence of others. It's tough when that happens. Leaders can be wrong. What is never wrong is the word of God.

You can tell a lot about a person's character when they are presented with facts that show that they are not right. Most push the defensive button and try to find a way to save face and turn things around. Pride can color our reason. A humble man will appreciate knowing that he has done things incorrectly. He wants to be right and his hope is in the Lord, and not himself. Some want to roll up their sleeves and have a real knock down fight when questioned about something they said or did. That's the wrong spirit. That's not what the Lord would want.

Second, the pressure of others, especially family, can cloud our judgment and cause us to not stand with the Lord. For Peter, it was the Jews. He feared them. They were powerful, loud and aggressive. They were the drive to crucify Jesus. Sometimes elders are pressured by their wives and they may not do as they ought to because they "fear" trouble at home. Some use the threat of leaving to get their way. Unless you change, we will leave they say. I've noticed every church building that I have ever been in has a door. Some just need to use it. Anyone who uses pressure, threats or intimidation to get what they want doesn't have the right heart to begin with. Use that door! We must follow the Bible, even if it goes against what our family wants or what others want. Every religious body has had a period of division in its history. There are always those who want to change, and often that change isn't helpful, needful or even right. Some like to change for the sake of change. They like being different. Some tire of doing things the same way. Traditions, they scream, are killing us. So, they want a new tradition. The tradition of being different.

We must stand firm with the Lord. The pressures of others when they are not Biblical, must not move us.

Third, Peter seems to get things right once again. Peter sure seems like a yo-yo to us. Confessing the Lord, then denying the Lord. Cutting off the ear of one who came to arrest Jesus but, also, crying for the Lord to save him because he was sinking in water. Courageous and fearful. Strong and weak. Preaching to Gentiles and then standing away from Gentiles. Peter is certainly one on a journey. The Lord loved Peter. He was patient with him. And, so many of us stand in Peter's shadows. There are days that we are strong, vocal and standing with the Lord. There are other days when we are sitting with the enemy.

There would be more good coming from Peter after this. God uses Peter to write first and second Peter. Powerful books that deal with tough times, fiery trials of persecution, false teachers and the coming of the Lord. Peter would encourage believers to be strong against the pressures of wrong. How those words must have reminded him of the days when he wasn't strong. God wasn't finished with Peter. And, God isn't finished with us either. More days to shine that light. More times to encourage. More times to teach. We make mistakes. We say the wrong things. We sin. God doesn't throw us under the bus. Sometimes others might, but not God. He's still there waiting on us to get our hearts and minds in the right place.

Finally, hypocrisy can be stopped. It's not a life sentence. It's not like once you have it, you'll always have it. There as a time when Peter wasn't this way. Then there was a time, later on, when Peter was not like this. Hypocrisy is more the state of the mind and the emphasis is upon how others view us. The hypocrite wants to look good before others. He is more concerned about image and presence than he is the relationship with God. Hypocrisy leaves when a person focuses back upon God. That's where we ought to be all along.

I've heard people say, "I know a church that says what I'm doing is fine." So. I could probably find a dozen churches to agree with you. The church doesn't save you. The church can be wrong. It's God that matters. When we focus upon pleasing God and doing what He says, we really do not care what others think. Peter the hypocrite is not how we define him. He found the courage to stand up to the Jewish pressure. He found the faith to walk with the Lord. And, in doing that, his hypocrisy left.

Through the years we change. We learn. We grow. We see things better. And, with this, our hearts grow. Our faith grows. We become better. We become more like Jesus.

Did Barnabas change? We are not told, but I just want to think that he did. It's hard to hear the words of Paul and continue to stay a hypocrite. Only a prideful fool would do that. Yes, I want to think that Barnabas learned some lessons. Sometimes we can follow a preacher as he walks away from the Scriptures. We love the preacher. He's such a good person. But all that can blind our eyes to what is said in the Bible. Peter, Paul and Barnabas, all together here. What a powerful group.

Don't let someone pressure you into leaving what the Scriptures teach. How fitting, within the same book of Galatians, Paul warns that if he or an angel from Heaven were to preach a different Gospel, let him be accursed.

Powerful words for then and for now.

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)
