



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

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1 Samuel 8:5 "and they said to him, 'Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.'"

Israel wanted a king. They wanted to be like all the nations around them. This was a rejection of God's leadership and an illustration of an interesting thread that connects several key principles together. Being like those around you is conforming. It's blending in. It's looking like, thinking like and acting like everyone else. The opposite of this is to stand out. It's being different. It's being transformed. That is the idea of being holy. We tend to think that "holy" means to be religious. The word means to be separate or set apart. It's being different.

Now, when one is different than everyone else he stands out. He's noticed. That is where letting your light shine comes from. The light shines the brightest in the darkest places. We refer to this as influence. So, there is the conceptual thread-transformation to holiness to light shining or influence. They are all connected together and they all fall apart when one longs to be like everyone around him.

When a person is like those around him, whether in talk, or in dress, or in attitude, he will take his cue from what they are doing. He'll laugh at what they think is funny. He'll go along so he can fit in. He wants to be one of them. This is the very pressure that our young people feel. This is at school. This is on the field of sports. This is the pressure that a young graduate feels at his first job. He wants to fit in and he wants to do well. So, he goes along with everyone else.

If a person doesn't do that, they will be noticed. They are seen as different. And that fact of being different is more than many can handle. It is noticed by others. Being different sometimes leads to being excluded or even made fun of. That right there, is the social death for many. You don't fit in. You aren't invited. You aren't one of them. You are different.

Israel wanted a visible king. They wanted to be like the other nations. The other nations had kings that spoke. The other nations had kings that wore crowns, rode upon white horses and led the troops into battle. The other nations had a sense of identity. "Long live the king," has a face you can put on that. But up to this point Israel was different. They had a king, but no one could see Him. Israel's king not only led them into battle, but had been victorious time and time again. Israel's king was benevolent, kind and expected the nation to be different as He was. Israel had a king. That King was God. But, they wanted something else. They wanted to no longer be different. They wanted to be like the other nations. That process would kill their influence. It would no longer make them holy or different. It would mean that they were no longer transformed, but they would conform. What the other nations did, is what Israel would do.

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So, Israel got a king. And, when you look at the long lineage of kings in Israel's history you see, idolatry, wars, turmoil, assassinations, and trouble. Yes, they were like the other nations. The other nations had those things and now, so did Israel.

The pull to fit in, blend in and be like others comes with a cost. The greatest cost is that we lose our holiness. We are no longer different. We are no longer following Christ. For the young person, it may be swearing, smoking and breaking rules that makes him seem like everyone else. It causes him to cross a barrier of right and wrong. For the young worker it may be doing some things that are not ethical. It may be bending the rules here and there. To fit in, to be like the others, either he'll go along or else he'll become so uneasy and uncomfortable that he will look for another job.

One of the toughest lessons that needs to be taught in our homes is how to survive being different. You will be noticed. You may be bullied. You may be the source of jokes. You may not be invited, included or welcome. That pressure is so hard, you feel like blending in.

First, letting the household know that we are different is where it begins. Talk about it. Make sure it's not the attitude that we are better than others, but rather, we follow Christ and that makes us different. Talk about ways you will be different. You will not wear what everyone else is wearing. You will not go to all the movies that others go to. You will be in the church house on Sunday worshipping God. You will have curfews and must let it be known where you are at all times. It's tough, but we want to go to Heaven.

Second, let them see that difference in you. How do you act when you are with family members who are not Christians? How do you act at ballgames? It's easy for school age kids to get the impression that once I get old enough I no longer have to be different. It's like sitting at the kids table at the holidays. Once you are old enough, you get to move up to the big table. In their minds, they may think that being different is something that only happens when you are in school. Once you are out, you can be like everyone else. They need to see that you are different. In your language, attitude, outlook and habits.

Third, reassure the family that following Christ is the best thing to do. They may be afraid. They may feel bad about not being able to go to some places that their friends are going. Help them through those moments. Find great quality people to put them around. Do things with others who feel and believe the way you do. Make it a priority to assure them that they are on the right path.

Finally, we need to remind ourselves, that following others and being like the world is a dead-end street. Holiness, influence, transformation, begins in our heart and it begins with our faith. Israel failed. The leadership of Israel failed. A few bright spots, such as David, but for the most part, you'd never know that they were the people of God. They got what they wanted-to be like others. And, in the end, they finished up like the other nations-defeated, captured and not making any impact in the generations around them.

Being different leads to transformation which leads to being noticed. Holiness leads to being an influence. These are tough lessons that we all must work through. Don't leave these to your young people to work out on their own, because they generally won't. It's much easier to just follow the crowd. It takes faith, courage and trusting God to be different. That's where Israel missed it. They traded all of that in so they could look like everyone else.

Time to have some discussions around the kitchen table. We belong to Christ.

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)
