



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 # 2317

Romans 15:1 "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves."

In every relationship there are moments of disagreements and times we bump each other. In the game of basketball, those bumps are called fouls. Too many fouls and one watches the rest of the game from the bench. But in life, we don't call fouls. What we do is complain, gossip, cry, ignore, or push back. Those who walk with Christ forgive. Unlike basketball, there are no refs in life. There is no one to blow a whistle and call us out when our attitude is out of line or when we have been offensive, or when a remark should not have been uttered. We must police ourselves. We must watch what we say and how we say it.

Those who walk with Christ are careful about that. Those who don't, won't care. They leave a trail of destruction behind them. Our verse today, is not directed towards the world, because the world wouldn't get this. You must be with Christ before these words make sense. The verse ends with "not just please ourselves." To the world, what else is there, other than please your self. That's the basis of marriage, according to the world. That's why people are rude, offensive, impatient, prejudice and hate these days. They just care about themselves. No, these words are for Christians.

Romans 14 and 15 are tied together by the same subject matter. The issue at hand was whether or not Christians could eat meats that had been sacrificed to idols. Some could. Some that bothered. Does that mean one is condoning idolatry? Does that mean one is supporting idols? Does that compromise the purity of the Gospel? Tough questions and tough places to be in. It seems crystal clear to us, but it wasn't for them. To make things more difficult, what if someone in the church did the opposite of you? Did that mean they were wrong? Were you wrong? Could we be in unity and disagree like this? It was enough to splinter churches today. I expect that would be the solution most would turn to. We'd have a meat-eating church and a veggie church. But dividing was never discussed in these chapters. What is talked about is how to stop judging one another and how to get along.

Our verse is just one of several principles that outline the steps of how they were to survive. The strong had to look out for the weak. The strong had to tolerate, be patient and help the weak. The strong were not to do whatever they wanted to do. They were not to please just themselves. They had to think about the other guy.

(OVER)

Now some thoughts:

First, why should the strong bear the weak? The apostle said so. God says so. In God's kingdom it is not the survival of the fittest or the strong who dominate over the weak. Power and might do not rule. Consideration of each other keeps everyone going. It's like seeing a family at the airport. They are all pulling different sizes of suitcases. The little guy is tagging behind. The dad, stops and waits for him. The strong help the weak. This is not just being kind, which we are supposed to be, this helps us to stay together and be together. Our worship, our journey is not individual, but together. We pray for one another. We help one another.

Second, there are subjects, there are issues, there are applications in which you and I are sometimes strong and other times weak. The topic at hand in Romans 15 is about eating meats. On that topic, some were strong and others were weak. But switch the topic, and you might find the strong are now weak and the weak are now strong. It's a stretch to think that the strong are strong all the time and on all topics. Likewise, the weak are not necessarily weak in faith as 1 Thessalonians 5 discusses. They are weak in regards to eating meats sacrificed to idols. They may be strong in attendance. Strong in prayer. Strong in sound doctrine. Our convictions and our consciences and our opinions are shaped by our understanding of God's word but they are also colored by our experiences and our past.

Third, throughout our journey, one may move from being weak to being strong. As one learns, grows, thinks things out, he may see things differently. At first, he may have been influenced by how he was brought up. Maybe his parents were also weak in these areas. But as time passes and as he associates with strong brethren, he begins to see things differently. His opinions change. He understands where the strong are coming from and in time, he even agrees with them. I think this is what Paul was hoping would happen in Rome. Help them. Show them. Be patient with them. Don't write them off. Don't run them off. Don't judge nor condemn them. And, don't just please yourself.

Fourth, I wonder what worship would look like if each person had their own way. For starters, some probably would rather have worship in the afternoon and sleep in during the mornings. Others are early risers. They'd probably like to start worship around 6 A.M. Some really like singing, and if they had their way, we'd probably have forty songs each worship. Others would like to see more preaching.

What is interesting about our verse is that it is not about worship. It's about eating and the eating was done not in the church building (they didn't have church buildings) but in the home. Which tells us that even when we leave the worship and we go home, I can't say "what happens in my house is no one else's business." That is another way of saying, "I am going to do what I want to do," or as our verse expresses it, "please yourself." Can't do that. We are connected now. We are family now. We must be thinking of the other person. How would others know what was happening in their homes? They would see each other in the market places buying food, and here, it's meat. They would be in each other's homes.

The prevailing thought is to be considerate of others. Don't put your blinders on and ignore the feelings of others. Don't go through life thinking, "that's their problem." The strong ones need to help the weak ones. And, to do this the best, we must remember that we are all in this together.

Roger Shouse (used by permission)
