



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 #3136

1 Timothy 1:13 "even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief."

Multiple times throughout the N.T., Paul honestly tells of his past. He did all that he could to stamp out Christianity. Our verse defines him as a persecutor and violent aggressor. In Acts 26, he admits to casting his vote against Christians that led to their deaths. He punished Christians in synagogues and forced them to blasphemy, in his words, "being furiously enraged at them." Paul was determined to stop the spread of Christianity. He made it his personal battle to put an end to Christianity.

There are several lessons for us in all of this:

First, it was through persecution that Christianity filled the world. As brethren spread out and fled one area, they took their faith with them. As Paul stomped on the fire of faith, sparks fell elsewhere that continued to burn brightly. Some times the worst times are the best times for spreading faith. We like peace, affluence, and good times, but those may be the very elements that make sharing the gospel difficult.

Second, some are more aggressive in the wrong than those are in the right. Paul got letters and traveled to other cities just to continue his attack upon the movement of Christ. Even today, some are busy filling social media with lies, attacks and slander about the faith in Christ Jesus. And, while this is going on, those with the truth are often sitting silently on the sidelines of life. It took the push of persecution to get Christians to go to other cities.

Third, as Paul changed, his passion and determination never did. He shifted. He became a believer. Instead of trying to wipe out Christianity, he now traveled from city to city with the saving message of Christ. He continued to be aggressive. He continued to be passionate. He never lost those traits. Now, they were guided in the right direction. What a wonderful lesson for us. When some change, it seems that they lose their spark and the energy is no longer there. Passionate about sin, now they are simply drifting in the Lord. Paul never lost his zeal and fire for what he thought was right. Some are more excited about sports, making money, building a career than salvation in the Lord. They drag into worship and seem lifeless and indifferent.

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Not Paul. Instead of dragging people out of the synagogue he was now in those same places preaching the gospel of Christ.

Fourth, forgiveness is not the same thing as forgetting. We can easily assume the two are the same. If Paul had been forgiven by God, how did the Holy Spirit inspire him to retell these events about his life as a persecutor? Had God not forgotten them? Forgiveness and forgetting are not the same. We can put things out of our minds and in time forget about them. Does that mean we are forgiven? No. When God declares that he remembers the sin no more, it means that God does not hold that person accountable. How could a forgiven Peter have the story of his betrayal written years later by inspiration in the Gospels?

Sometimes forgetting is not a blessing. Remembering the pain, the guilt and the sorrow may keep us from making the same wrong choices again. When we put those things out of our minds, we are likely to stumble right back into them again. No lessons learned. None the better because of that. And, the merry-go-round of sin is repeated over and over and a person wonders how they will ever get off that. Peter tells us of those who are spiritually blind and short-sighted, having forgotten their purification from their former sins.

The N.T. tells us to be zealous for good works. Our worship ought to be passionate and heartfelt. Our prayers are to be fervent or feverous.

The zealous persecutor became the zealous preacher. He changed directions, but he never lost his passion. What a great reminder for each of us.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)
