



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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1 Corinthians 1:2 "to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours."

It seems as Christians that we struggle with how we see ourselves. I've sat through sermons that reminded the audience that we are all sinners and that being true, doesn't make one feel very good about himself. We've let God down. We've hurt others. We've broken promises, ruined trust and made a big mess of things. It's a wonder that God would have anything to do with us. And, that picture is often the state of things presently. It's not only our past before Christ, but even after Christ, we sin.

But on the other hand, there are the statements from Heaven. Yes, God knows that we sin. Yes, God reminds us that we constantly need the blood of Jesus. But here in our verse today, we have the refreshing words of "sanctified" and "saints," being uttered by the Holy Spirit. And, these words are directed to a church that most of us would run from. A divided church. A church filled with jealousy. A church that misunderstood and even abused the Lord's Supper. A church that was suing one another. And, in all that mess, this letter is addressed to those who are sanctified and are saints in Christ Jesus.

Some thoughts for us:

First, it's easy to walk into one chapter of a person's life and conclude that defines his life. We all have good days and not so good days. There are some days that we are on the mountain top with Moses and the Lord. There are other days when we are in the deepest valley with the Shepherd. Busy. Tired. Stressed. My wife asked me the other day what my week looked like. I told her it was going to be one of the busiest weeks ever. She said, "You said that about last week."

Second, it's good to see the balance we are to have in viewing ourselves. We are saints of God, yet we also sin. Like the ole' teeter-totter, too much one way gets things out of balance. If all we see are the sins in our lives, then we will never walk with confidence in the Lord and we will never feel like we will make it to Heaven. Doom and despair will be our dearest companions.

(OVER)

Yet, on the other side, if all we see is that we are walking Heavenly, we might get a bit self righteous and fail to see that there are things that we need to work on in our lives. I've always liked the statement, "Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future."

Realizing our struggle keeps us close to the Lord and allows us to help others. Realizing God's grace and mercy helps us to understand that God uses us in His kingdom. Every king, prophet, apostle, judge and preacher that God used not only had a past but had to deal with sins in the present. Paul called himself the "chief of sinners," present tense.

Marred as we are, God uses us. Sanctified as we are, the world needs us. It's a balance. We are a work in progress.

Third, once we start seeing ourselves properly, then we can start seeing others the same, especially our brethren. We can focus only upon the mistakes that some have made and come to the conclusion that they are not trying very hard. Could it be that we caught them on a bad day? Could it be that we have never seen the good and holy deeds that they do? Pointing that spiritual radar gun at others is so easy and in some ways, so much fun. We catch others doing wrong and we are ready to be the one to write out a spiritual ticket. Cuff and stuff them is the spirit that many have. And, when someone does something very good, we get jealous and try to find ways to pick apart their motive. "They are doing that just to be noticed," we conclude. All of this comes from a spirit that fails to see someone as they really are.

I find it interesting that the Corinthian letter begins with this reminder that you are sanctified and are saints in Christ Jesus. Could it be they needed that reminder? Could it be hearing that, some of the troubles would have taken care of themselves? Is suing your brother something that saints would do? Is dividing the spirit of sanctified people? Hearing that is a reminder.

Could it be that we need to be reminded as well. If all we hear is that we are terrible people, then we will start thinking that's the way we are supposed to be. But realizing we are citizens in God's kingdom, and, we are part of God's divine family, adopted by God Himself, then we might start acting more "saintly."

God loves us and Jesus died for us. That's what God thinks of us.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)