



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 # 2311

1 Corinthians 9:27 "But I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."

We are in the midst of March Madness and here in Indiana, where basketball is king, there is a lot of excitement about our favorite teams. I had a friend from the south visiting recently. He asked if all this hype about Indiana basketball was true. I told him about the size of some of the high school gyms and then told him to drive around and notice all the basketball goals. He came back with stories of seeing goals on garages, on barns, on poles and even saw one on a tree. That's basketball in Indiana.

Our verse draws from the world of sports. Paul uses parallels from the field of track (v. 24) and boxing (v. 26). His points are clear. The lessons are obvious. Run in such a way that you will win. We strive for an imperishable crown. Run with direction and purpose. Discipline your body to serve you. Don't be disqualified. Be in control.

These thoughts make simple lessons for a Wednesday evening invitation. But that was not Paul's intention. His words are powerful. The thoughts are deep. Be in control of yourself so that you will not be disqualified. The disqualified do not receive a prize. The disqualified go home as losers. And, in this setting, it wasn't that you got beat by a better team. Here, you got beat by yourself. You were not prepared. You weren't ready. You lost and it was your fault.

Now, some thoughts:

First, we must be in control. One of the virtues found in 2 Peter is self control. We try to control others but we can't. We'd like to control the weather, but we can't. But what we can control, we often don't. Control our tongue and our anger. You could say something, but you won't, because you are under control. The way that one guy is driving sure makes you want to do something, but you won't because you are under control. Your thoughts are under control. Your words are under control. Your actions are under control. Your passions and feelings are under control. When your life is not under control, you are along for a ride. Who knows where your tongue, feelings and attitude may take you. Out of control, you're likely to say anything, even if it's cruel, hurtful and untrue. Out of control, you're likely to explode in anger at any moment. It's uncomfortable being around someone who is out of control. You don't know when they might blow up. You walk on egg shells, fearing them.

Second, we put ourselves in control when the Words of Jesus fill our hearts. This is not something that others can do for us. No one can put you in control and no one can put me in control. We do it to ourselves. The honest and good heart that intersects with the Word of God will change. Kindness replaces rudeness. Listening replaces shouting. Patience replaces demands and threats. Forgiveness replaces revenge. Christ replaces selfishness. These are all choices, choices made by us when our hearts are filled with the Word of God.

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Third, Paul understood that unless he controlled himself, he would be disqualified. In a track event, it might be embarrassing to be disqualified, but there will be other races. But, here, to be disqualified by God meant you are not pleasing the Lord and you are kept from Heaven. There are consequences to being out of control. When a person declares, "I couldn't help it," they are not honest. They could, if they were under control. We don't have to sin. No one makes us sin. The very body that houses our soul can

be a great asset or a great liability to us. There is a direct connection between our body and our soul. What we do in our body impacts our soul. Unless our body is subject to Christ, we will lose our soul. You can't love the Lord with your heart and disobey Him with your body.

Fourth, Paul never overestimated grace. The word grace doesn't come up in this section. Just love the Lord is the flavor of the month. Love the Lord and party like a wild college student on Spring Break. Love the Lord but worship anyway you want. Love the Lord and don't even pay attention to the Bible. How can one think this way? Abuse of grace. Thinking that these things do not matter, grace will get me through.

Somehow Paul didn't think that way. Why run in such a way, if you have grace? Why discipline your body, if you have grace? Grace will take care of it. Why sweat the details? Why worry about the small things? Why fuss over walking exactly? Grace will cover it. Grace will fill in the gaps. Grace will erase all the times you colored outside the lines. Funny, you don't find that here. What you do read is Paul saying that he buffet his body. That word 'buffet' carries the idea of beating or bruising. Paul was not describing self affliction but the intensity of following Christ. These things did matter. There is a certain way to run. If you don't run that way you won't win. Paul understood that he could be disqualified.

Now, does this lead to perfection? We must be perfect or we won't make it. No. But what Paul is driving at is the motive, ambition and drive behind what we are doing. Carelessness says it doesn't matter. Indifference will flippantly assume that grace takes care of everything and I don't even have to try. While we are not perfect, we are to strive as if we can be perfect. We must have as our ambition the desire to please the Lord. I know a couple of policemen. Recently I got to ride in a police SUV. We were escorting a funeral. Had the red and blue lights on. It was great. Now, because I know a couple of cops, would I drive foolishly knowing that if I got pulled over I could drop their names and avoid a ticket? Absolutely NOT. That's abusing our friendship and taking advantage of things. I've seen them out and about and I will wave to them, but I am not going to assume friendship will excuse my recklessness. Is it any different with God's grace? To be so careless and to assume that God will take care of things is to abuse and take advantage of things. God doesn't owe us forgiveness. He doesn't have to forgive us. It is His right. It is His privilege.

Fourth, Paul understood that he could be disqualified. That's amazing. Can you imagine if he was? We'd be looking for him in Heaven and he wouldn't be there. Look at all the good he did. Look at what his writings through the Holy Spirit have done. And, yet, he could be disqualified. And, if an apostle could be disqualified, you and I know all too well, that we could too. There's only one thing worse than being in Hell, and that's being a Christian in Hell. We are supposed to be on the other side. We worshipped. We prayed. We gave money. We were in this for decades, yet disqualified because we didn't run the way that God wanted us to. We could have, we just didn't want to. We should have, but we wanted to do what we like. We wanted to be happy. We wanted to be free. We wanted to do as we wanted to. And, that spirit and that tone leads to being disqualified. The first step of discipleship is to "deny yourself." That comes before following Jesus. That comes before taking up your cross. Denying self is to buffet your body. Denying self is to crucify yourself. Denying self is to make Jesus the Lord of your heart.

March madness-a great time in Indiana. Play by the rules. Play hard. Play fair. Give it your all. Losing is not an option. We sure can learn from these thoughts.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)
