

## ITCHING EARS

Reading Lesson: II Tim. 4:1-4

Focus: verses 3-4 "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

### Introduction

This passage, written by the Apostle Paul to his son in the faith, records an earnest, vital instruction to Timothy about preaching. Notice that Paul's charge is made "before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom." Citing God as a witness to the things he is about to say, Paul leaves no doubt about their serious and essential nature.

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine" This echoes what Paul had just written in the prior chapter concerning the function of the inspired scriptures, which are "...profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (II Tim. 3:16-17)

Then in verse 3 of our lesson, we see why Paul was emphasizing the necessity of such preaching: because a time was coming when the preacher's audience would not accept or tolerate the truth. Desiring to avoid things difficult and unpleasant, they would enlist speakers who would tell them what they wanted to hear. Unlike the Bereans, whose desire to know the truth prompted them to search the scriptures and verify what was preached (Acts 17:10-11), those with itching ears would readily forsake the truth for more palatable alternatives.

Paul seems to have known about this phenomenon from first-hand experience! He had not failed to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), but it did not always elicit a favorable response. He reminded the Galatians in chapter 4 that, at an earlier time, they had held him in such esteem that they would have given him their own eyes, but something had changed. In verse 16 of that chapter, he said "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" Apparently, their disposition toward him had grown chilly because he had preached the truth to them. What a serious and potentially fatal flaw - to turn from the truth because we find it personally abrasive, and to substitute the soothing balm of a diluted message.

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**God's Prescribed Mode of Worship**

Jesus told the Samaritan woman that the time had come when "true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in *truth*: for the Father seeketh such to worship him." (Jn. 4:23) Certainly the Holy Spirit will bear witness to, and sanction, the preaching of the truth, but this verse has a personal application for us. To offer service that is acceptable to God, each of us must approach Him with a sincere and honest heart - and that includes being *truthful* about whatever deficiencies are exposed by God's message. No wonder the "thorough furnishing" of a man of God includes a source for "doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction," for these things are needful for His people.

**Symptoms**

As with all maladies, there are certain indications that can be recognized in those who have itching ears. (Be assured, they are not all members of the mega-churches whose pastors preach the gospel of prosperity.)

*Love of Self* - II Tim. 3:2 says in the last days people will be lovers of their own selves. Such individuals are preoccupied with pleasing self, rather than God.

*Importance of Self* - an elevated opinion of oneself. The opposite of Ph. 2:3, this sentiment esteems self above others because of a feeling of being special and deserving of privilege.

*Confidence in Self* - a genuine belief that "I am right and I know what's best for me and you." As a result, they seek to fulfill their own view of things, insisting on their way, regardless of God's will. "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes." Prov. 16:2

*Lack of Honesty with Self* - ignoring one's shortcomings and squelching anything that reveals one's deficiencies and imperfections; preferring to look at the mirror through rose-colored glasses to avoid the painful realities of a flawed existence. It is much easier to see the "motes" in others than the "beams" in ourselves. Mt. 7:3-5

*Compromise of the Truth* - willing to settle for less than the whole truth, preferring to hear something favorable and false, over something unfavorable but true. Remember the lesson of Ahab who complained that the prophet Micaiah never prophesied good to him, always evil. Upon demanding the truth and hearing a negative forecast, he had the prophet put in prison. Filled with self-will, Ahab ignored the warning and proceeded to engage the Syrians at Ramoth-gilead, where he was mortally wounded. I Ki. 22:1-38 and II Chr. 18:4-34

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**The Proper Response**

*Confidence in the Messenger*

Jer. 3:15 says "I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and instruction." We need Holy Spirit-placed pastors and then we need to have confidence in their faithfulness to declare the message that God has given them for us.

*Reverence for the Message and its Author*

We judge the importance of our mail based on who the sender is. Junk mail from an unknown source is soon discarded, but a letter from someone dear or important quickly claims our attention.

Believing that the message is from Almighty God and addressed to each of us, we need to hear it with our hearts and not just our ears. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Mt. 11:15 We need to take it seriously and ask ourselves, "Lord, how does this apply to me?" May the Lord not say of us what was said of those in Is. 30:9-10, "...this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord: which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits."

*Take the Medicine - All of It!*

The undiluted truth of God's word will do us all good like medicine. It may not taste good going down, but in the end it will make us better. Heb. 12:11 says "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Like the prophet Nathan who called out the sin of King David, the preached word will spotlight the things in our lives that need to be acknowledged and corrected.

*Consider the Consequences*

Hos. 4:6 warns that "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou has rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou has forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children." It is a dangerous thing to trade the truth for a softer alternative. Those who stop their ears risk spiritual calamity for themselves and their children.

**Conclusion**

Let us embrace the message of the Lord and the preaching of His word. Let us hunger after it and cherish it for the precious commodity that it is. Let us "Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding." Prov. 23:23