

ITCHY EARS

Scripture Reading: Read 2 Timothy 4

If you have ever tangled with a patch of poison ivy, you know how itchy the rash can be. The treatment in our home growing up was calamine lotion. My mother would blot it on using cotton balls and we ended up looking like some creature from a horror movie with pink blotches of calamine all over the affected area, but at least it would relieve the itch for a while!

In 2 Timothy 4, Paul speaks of a spiritual rash that affects the ears. *“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”* Paul knew that a time was coming when folks would no longer want to hear a “Thus saith the Lord” from their preachers and teachers. They would reject the inspired Word of God and, instead, seek after a message that tickled their fancy.

When we look at the state of the pulpit today in many churches, we find Paul’s words spot on. God’s love and grace are preached but his holiness and righteousness are missing. Tolerance and inclusiveness have replaced conviction and being set apart. Self-help and self-improvement are at the forefront but brokenness and Spirit-dependence have fallen by the wayside. Preaching that focuses on the cross, sin, judgment and eternity are practically non-existent in some pulpits. Itchy ears demand spiritual calamine; a soothing message of joy, peace, hope and love with little or no demands. Such a message draws crowds but it fails to produce disciples. It’s filled with goodies but fails to mention the cost of self-denial and taking up one’s cross.

Knowing that such a day was coming, Paul challenged Timothy to remain spiritually sober, vigilant and faithful to God’s Word and call. *“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction...But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.”* Paul’s solution to itchy ears was more of the Word. Timothy was to be ready at all times to bring the Word of God to bear on a situation. As pastor of the church in Ephesus, he was to correct, rebuke and encourage believers to take hold of and obey the Word of God. Yet, he was to do so with great patience and careful instruction. We dare not miss this point. There are times we may become frustrated when people abandon the truth. We may even become angry, lose our head and our spiritual sobriety and end up throwing the Scripture at them with a condescending, vengeful and judgmental attitude. Such a response is both ungodly and unhelpful (cf. 2 Timothy 2:23-26). The only cure for itchy ears is more of the Word shared with a humble and loving heart.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Are you running after preachers and teachers who offer spiritual calamine for your itchy ears? Isn’t it time to stop scratching and start submitting to the whole counsel of God? If yes, then repent today. Also, pray for your pastor to remain faithful to preach the Word in love this coming weekend.

Take-a-way: *The only cure for itchy ears is the truth of God’s Word spoken in love!*