

ITCHING EARS AND PLEASANT PREACHERS

INTRODUCTION.

- A. Scripture text: 2Timothy 4:1-4. From Roy H. Enoch 09-04-1994.
- B. Men have always had a natural desire to please themselves.
 - 1. It is normal for infants to want attention, and to demand what they want.
 - 2. They have to be taught to be patient, that they don't need every thing they want, and to be considerate of others.
 - 3. They have to be taught to focus on needs rather than wants, and to consider the needs and rights of others as well as their own.
 - 4. Respect for authority has to be taught, and corrections and punishment is an important part in learning responsibility for our actions.
- C. This is more true in spiritual things than in physical and social contexts.
 - 1. Man does have a natural yearning to worship, but the object and manner of worship must be taught.
 - 2. It is easier to see the consequences of violating physical laws and even social customs than spiritual law.
 - 3. Self-centered men have always wanted to worship in a way that pleased themselves rather than please the one worshipped.
- D. Anyone with ordinary powers of observation can see that Paul's prophecy is true today.
 - 1. Ears itching to hear what is pleasant and pleasing are the norm for our time.
 - 2. And there are always teachers who are willing to tell people anything that they want to hear--to scratch itching ears.
 - 3. Religious teachers like this serve themselves and those they please, rather than serve God.
 - a. They deceive themselves.
 - b. They deceive those they please.
 - c. They also deceive those who are innocent as well.
- E. This lesson: to study Bible examples of this problem.
 - 1. The Bible often spoke of prophets pleasing men.
 - 2. It is prevalent in our country today.

I. THE OT HAD MANY PROPHETS WHO PLEASSED MEN.

- A. The true prophets of God often were rejected by those who hated to hear the truth.
 - 1. Their love for God and dedication to truth grieved them to see God's people turn to false prophets who would tell them what they wanted to hear.
 - 2. They were also grieved to know the consequences of such actions.
- B. King Ahab is an example of those who gathered false prophets who would tell him what he wanted to hear (1Kgs. 22:1-37).
 - 1. Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, visited Ahab, king of Israel.
 - 2. Ahab proposed that they recapture Ramoth-Gilead from Syria.
 - 3. Jehoshaphat said, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses" (v4).
 - 4. But Jehoshaphat said, "Please inquire for the word of the Lord today." v. 5
 - 5. Ahab called his 400 prophets and they all urged him to go "for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king" (v6).
 - 6. But Jehoshaphat said, "Is not there STILL a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of Him?" (v 7).
 - 7. Ahab said, "There is STILL one man, Micaiah...by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me but EVIL" (disaster rather than wickedness or moral wrong).

8. The messenger who went for Micaiah, told him what the other prophets had said and suggested that he say the same.
 9. Micaiah replied: "As the Lord lives, whatever the Lord says to me, that I will speak" (v14).
 10. When Micaiah came in to Ahab and the 400 false prophets, he mimicked them, "Go and prosper, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king!" (v15).
 11. But Ahab answered, "How many times shall I make you swear that you tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?" (v16). Why did Ahab not make the 400 prophets swear the same thing?
 12. Then Micaiah told Ahab the word of the Lord: "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, 'These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace'" (v17).
 13. Then Ahab told Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but EVIL?" (v18).
 14. Then Ahab had Micaiah put in prison on bread and water.
 15. Micaiah's prophecy from God came true and shows clearly how men have ears itching for being pleased rather than the truth.
- C. Isaiah described the same spirit in his day concerning both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.
1. He prophesied 18 years before the northern kingdom went into Assyrian captivity and for 38 years afterward, warning Judah.
 2. He describes the attitude of many in both kingdoms (Isa. 30:8-11).
 3. The northern kingdom of Israel went into Assyrian captivity in 721BC and the southern kingdom of Judah into Babylonian captivity in 605BC.
- D. Jeremiah weeps for Judah a century later and describes what God says that Judah has done and the consequences (Jer. 5:29-31).
1. God considered it "astonishing and horrible" for people to want prophecy to please them and for prophets to give them what they wanted.
 2. He still does.

II. **THERE ARE MANY ITCHING EARS IN OUR COUNTRY TODAY.**

- A. Denominationalism has developed to try to satisfy the itching ears of religious people.
1. They have agreed to let people believe what they want and not condemn each other.
 2. They often practice open membership and respect each other's teachings and beliefs.
 3. They will tolerate almost any doctrine, including homosexuality, but not the specific commands of Jesus and His condemnation of other doctrines and sin.
- B. Popular preachers condemn sin in general terms and praise God's love generally, but do not describe His wrath.
1. In my graduate work in speech, I had a seminar: "Persuasion and Social Control".
 2. A doctoral student who was a Baptist preacher wrote a 24-page research paper on the revivalism of Billy Sunday and Billy Graham and especially their New York Campaigns.
 3. He described both of them as starting out preaching with great zeal and power in condemning sin specifically and without favor.
 4. But as they began to be more popular and reach out to greater audiences, they became more vague about sin and the teachings of X about how to be saved.
 5. They began to focus more on social problems and needs of the masses rather than individual sin and the need for a change in the focus of individual lives.
 6. As they tried to reach more people, they tried to tickle itching ears.

- C. Many in the Lord's church today are trying the same.
1. As Paul stated, many had rather hear stories than the word of God, but Paul said to preach the word anyway (2Tim. 4:2).
 2. Many had rather hear only what pleases them, but Paul said he declared the whole council of God (Ac. 20:27).
 3. It is not surprising that sinners do not want to hear what God says about the consequences of sin.
 - a. Those who know that they are sick often do not want the doctor to tell them the whole truth about their condition.
 - b. Sometimes people will change doctors until they find one who tells them what they want to hear.
 - c. Sometimes people do the same with preachers.
 - d. But they do not change their condition, nor truth, nor the consequences.
 4. Many preachers have been warned against preaching on giving, because, "The brethren here just won't stand for it."
 5. Others have been warned against preaching on drinking, adultery, denominationalism, and many other subjects.
 6. It is a sad commentary on church members who have no love for the truth, but think that they can ease their consciences by using preachers who make the worldly comfortable.

CONCLUSION.

- A. Too many brethren pay more attention to p-r-o-f-i-t-s than p-r-o-p-h-e-t-s.
 1. They are too indulgent to have their pleasure disturbed.
 2. They want preachers who guarantee their comfort and to also please their friends.
- B. But the man of God cannot afford to say "yes" if God says "no".
 1. A man of God cannot be a "yes man" to please men.
 2. Paul was hurt by his own "children in the gospel" and asked (Gal. 4:16).
 3. Paul expressed the attitude of a true man of God (1Cor. 9:16).
- C. There is one more to be abhorred than the one with itching ears: it is the preacher who is willing to please them.
- D. See 1Cor. 16:13; Jn. 8:32.