

They tell you what you want to hear

“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

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.” (2 Timothy 4:1-4)

Link to podcast: [“Itching Ears,”](#) a top ten podcast out of 600+ podcasts

A great danger confronts our lives today, the danger of only hearing what we want to hear. This peril threatens to control our lives. Blacklists and censorship, once thought of as outdated and abolished, rear their ugly heads once again.

It has reached a place where people attack those who do not agree with them and silence them. This danger permeates our society and threatens to control every aspect of our lives. For example, it infiltrates politics, education, finance, and even religious expression.

It has reached a point in our society where we listen to what we want to hear and prevent everything else. This danger allows the development of false messengers who deceive the unwary with false messages because they tell us what we want to hear.

Soon after Christ completed His earthly ministry, Christ followers experienced this same kind of trouble. Leaders of Christ's opponents began their opposition to believers. At first, these men disputed the facts of Christ's Person, God in a human body, His accomplishments, and His resurrection.

In their efforts, they twisted Christ's teachings and Old Testament truths to their liking. Then, they demanded that everyone accept their views to the exclusion of those who disagreed. They infiltrated local assemblies, taught their false and insidious doctrines, and provoked spiritual decay in believer's lives. Soon, believers clung to false beliefs.

To combat the rising infiltration and spiritual decline, God raised up Saul, later named Paul, to supply leadership to combat the presence and effects of those false prophets. Paul made a habit of warning his fellow believers of the dangers of false prophets in all his writings, except Philemon.

In 2 Timothy, Paul wrote to his young protégé warning on how to combat the problem of false prophets and the dangers that foster them.

Danger #1: Professing Believers Disavow Sound Doctrine.

“They will not endure sound doctrine.” (2 Timothy 4.3)

Paul warned Timothy that a time would come when professing believers would disavow sound doctrine. They would seek the false and not adhere to the truth.

What does it mean when it says they will not endure sound doctrine? It means, very literally, they won't stand for it. They will not put up with it. They want something else.

What sound doctrine will they not endure? In 1 Timothy 1.10-11, Paul used the exact phrase “sound doctrine” and explained in verse 11 what it meant:

“According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.”

Paul predicted professing believers would not endure the sound doctrine of the gospel, the good news of the gospel that would save them and reconcile them to God the Father. This group included not just those on the

outside of the Body of Christ, but also those within it. He said that members and professing believers, who said they followed Christ, would not put up with the gospel.

To overcome the danger of false prophets, Paul urged Timothy to preach the gospel and hold firm to its truths.

Danger Sign #2: Professing Believers Seek Personal Gratification.

“...but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.” (2 Timothy 4:3)

Paul warned Timothy of the danger of professing believers’ delight in satisfying their fleshly natures and desires. The phrase *“but after”* means they do not want this, but instead they do want something else.

They did not want a spiritual emphasis in their lives, but they enjoyed pursuing pleasure, which captivated their interests. Holiness, conspicuous by its absence, lacked appeal as they disavowed sound doctrine and sought personal gratification.

They did not want God's interference in their lives. Instead of the gospel and holy living, these professing Christians wanted messages that appealed to their human natures. To soothe their *“itching ears”* they chose pastors who would tell them what they wanted to hear.

Paul warned Timothy that these conditions give rise to false prophets and teachers.

Danger Sign #3: Professing Believers Turn To Error.

“And they shall turn away their ears from the truth.” (2 Timothy 4:4)

Paul reminded Timothy of the conclusion that would arise when Christ followers disavowed sound doctrine, especially the gospel. When professing believers disavow the gospel and seek personal gratification from those who will satisfy those desires, they will turn from the truth to error.

The decline into error, Paul said, begins with the disavowal of the sound doctrine of the gospel. Then, instead these objectors seek personal gratification from leaders who will provide it to them. When they gather to themselves deceptive leaders and pastors who deny the truth, they turn to fables, imaginations, and stories. They follow error, not the Bible.

Paul’s warning encouraged Timothy to proclaim the gospel truths without alteration. This proclamation would defeat those false prophets who altered the gospel and prevent the decline into error.

Correlation to today

The danger that Paul confronted with Timothy permeates the Christian society today, too. Christ followers face an increasing barrage of false prophets. These men and women hold positions of influence and leadership in the greater Body of Christ as well as local assemblies.

We face a grave problem today, the misstatement of the gospel. Too often the presentation of the “gospel” does not proclaim even the elementary truths of the gospel.

For example:

- **The Sinfulness Of Humanity**

The modern-day presentation of the gospel evades the issue of sin, because people do not want to hear about their sins.

The preaching of the gospel without including the truth of the sinfulness of mankind eliminates the key element of the gospel.

The gospel provides salvation from sin. Sadly, many professing believers have never come to recognize

their dire sinfulness before God, an elemental part of salvation.

▪ **The Helplessness Of Mankind To Reconcile With God**

No one contributes anything to his/her salvation. One preacher said wisely,

“The only thing that you bring to the salvation experience is your sin.”

Sinners, utterly helpless and dead in their trespasses and sins, obtain salvation only by a gift of grace from God. The presentation of the gospel today often excludes this truth.

Most people assume that sinners provide something toward their salvation. However, salvation is neither a cooperative nor a synergistic experience, one where each party takes part on a sharing basis.

Sinners contribute nothing to their salvation but their sin. Because preachers avoid these basic elements of the gospel, many people have not experienced Biblical salvation.

Leaders within the professing Body of Christ today follow the same practice that Paul warned Timothy people would practice in that day.

They will not endure the gospel. They will not put up with it. They do not explain it in its fullness. This describes the first issue that Paul’s warning to Timothy emphasized, which gives rise to false prophets: people do not want the gospel.

To avoid the growth of false prophets, the Christian leaders must overcome this error and return to a full presentation of gospel truths.

Further, the Bible expressly speaks against satisfying the demands of our fleshly natures. Paul wrote to his friends at Rome on this very issue.

“I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.” (Romans 7:18)

“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” (Romans 13:14)

This last reference refers to satisfying fleshly lusts instead of putting on Christ. To put it simply, “Do not pursue your own lusts. That is not the way you should live as a follower of Christ.” Professing believers often lack interest in the spiritual conditions of their lives.

They believe that holiness is reserved only for the devout, a possibility sought by dour believers. The preference for knowing God “...at a distance” makes the interest in an intimate knowledge of God outdated.

The popular faith does not want God’s interference in life. The discipline of walking with God, pursuing after Him in obedience and trust for life’s plans, has vanished.

To soothe their “itching ears” they “heap to themselves” pastors who tell them what they want to hear:

- lessons on struggling with stress;
- messages on managing finances;
- feel-good homilies; and
- superficial Biblical instruction.

The professing Body of Christ has entered this phase of decline. Professing believers now debate the existence of truth and exchange it for fables. The world has debunked and degraded the gospel of Jesus Christ for generations, saying that we cannot know truth, an unthinkable thought which Christ followers should never consider.

The world has said this for a long time. The world says,

“There is no exclusive truth. My truth is just as good as your truth.”

Of course, the world would say that. They do not want to believe God's truth, because it describes them as sinners in need of a Savior, and they don't want that.

However, it becomes an entirely different problem when false prophets, who profess to follow Christ, proclaim to their audiences:

"You can't know the truth."

Their error misleads people who respect and follow false prophets. False prophets teach that everyone can know their truth but cannot know God's truth, setting themselves above God.

Every false prophet, teacher, pastor, or leader, who makes these kinds of claims, sets up himself or herself above God. They create a "truth" that they impose which surpasses God's truth. The false prophet or teacher who says, "You can't know the truth" contradicts Scripture.

They sound like the serpent in the Garden of Eden who said,

"You'll not die. God has not told you the truth. I am telling you the truth. Believe me. Don't believe God."

On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus gave a series of messages to His disciples on the Holy Spirit recorded in John 14-16. Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Truth and told how the Holy Spirit would guide believers into the truth.

Christ told them:

"... when He comes, He will guide you into the truth. Many things I cannot tell you now, because you cannot understand them, you will not endure them, nor will you understand them. You cannot grasp them now. But when He comes, He will guide you into the truth."(John 16:13)

Further, Jesus said about Himself,

"I am the truth..." (John 14.6)

In His prayer in John chapter 17, Jesus prayed to His Father,

"One thing you will do Father; you will sanctify these people in the truth." (John 17:17)

The Bible presents each member of the Triune God, the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, as providers, teachers, and revealers of truth. To declare that no one can know spiritual truth defames the triune God and leads professing believers into error.

Summary

Paul's warning to Timothy applies to Christ followers today, too. In fact, he described the conditions and causes within Christian assemblies that give an open door to false teachers. These conditions allow false prophets to foster their fallacies and errors and enable them to step into the vacuum where they can assume positions of leadership and lead people astray.

The whole sequence presented in 2 Timothy 2.3-4 describes recently published Christian magazines, books, and television and radio broadcasts. Many counterfeit spiritual leaders produce books and internet articles and preach to vast crowds all over the world.

Organizations have risen in the last few years for the sole purpose of presenting error as true Christianity. Deceitful teaching looms dark over contemporary Christian assemblies.

To prevent the presence and growth of false prophets in Christian assemblies, we must heed Paul's warning to Timothy and turn from the practices that foster false prophets. Christ followers must reject the

popular trend toward the disavowal of the gospel to satisfy fleshly desires, which results in decline into error.

Untrustworthy teachers welcome the opportunity to encourage their followers to enjoy an easy and false doctrine. They do it subtly, carefully, and persuasively, so that error sounds like the truth.

To elude the support of false prophets in the Body of Jesus Christ, believers must reject the errors of the false prophets and pursue the truth after the knowledge of Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit Whom the Father and the Son sent to reveal it.

I urge you to bring these issues to the throne of God. Seek Him and His wisdom and stand for the inspired, inerrant, infallible, sufficient truth of the Word of God.

Professing believers, open your eyes to the truth. We can know the truth, and it will set us free from fostering false prophets.

Questions For Reflection and Application

1. Who can you identify that fits Paul's description of a false prophet?
2. What organization(s) and churches follow the pattern that Paul explained?
3. Do you presently attend an assembly that fits the description of Paul's warning to Timothy?
4. Can you recognize untruth when you hear it from the pulpit?
5. Do you follow the deceitful teachings of a false prophet(s)?
6. Has it caused you to consider that you cannot know the truth, that God does not demand of you total obedience and surrender of your rights in total submission to Him?
7. Do you pursue God and His righteousness above everything else?

Thank You, heavenly Father, for Your great grace in making provision for Your children by giving them warnings.

In giving the warnings, You present that which is true and that which is false and the consequences of that which is false.

And, Father, by Your Holy Spirit, apply these truths in our lives, that we might be taught by them, encouraged by them, strengthened by them, reaffirmed in the truth by them, corrected by them, conformed more assuredly and more completely to the truth.

We will give to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all the glory for what You accomplish. Amen.