



They Will Not Endure

By

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“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”

2 TIMOTHY 4:2-4

These verses may be familiar to you, but I’d like to focus on four words in the text –

“... they will not endure ...”

I will tell you up front that this is a rather sad story, but one we need to emphasize today. While there is some hope here, the battle is great and the time we have to fight is short.

Endurance

Timothy was a disciple of Jesus Christ, led to faith in Christ by the Apostle Paul. Timothy traveled with Paul and saw the great things God did through the preaching of His Word. Timothy was a witness to the greatness of God and the faithfulness and endurance of Paul. Endurance was at the heart of Paul's life and message.

“But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.”

2 TIMOTHY 3:10-11

“Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”

2 TIMOTHY 2:10

As Paul's physical death may have been just days or weeks away, he wrote a second letter to Timothy calling on him to be faithful and endure. In the words leading up to our text in chapter four, Paul had already told Timothy about the importance of endurance –

- “stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”
- “do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God”
- “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”
- “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”
- “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”
- “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane *and* idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.”

- “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.”
- “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and *that* they may come to their senses *and escape* the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to *do* his will.”
- “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come.”
- “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”
- All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”
- “I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in

season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”

Those were the words Paul shared with Timothy prior to writing – “For the time will come when they will not endure.”

This leads us to ask several questions:

1. Who are *they*?
2. What will they not *endure*?
3. Why will they not *endure*?
4. What will happen to those who do not *endure*?

They are the people who initially responded to Timothy’s preaching. We know this because of what follows immediately after our primary text –

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”

They were people Timothy knew personally and had preached the Gospel of Christ. They were people who had sat under Timothy's Bible teaching. They were people who did not endure the teaching Timothy gave them.

That's a sad and difficult place for any Bible teacher or preacher who is honestly presenting God's Word to people who gather in Christ's name.

What did Paul tell Timothy to do? What would Paul tell today's Bible teachers and preachers to do? **Endure** –

“But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

Notice the four things Paul emphasized to Timothy. He would emphasize the same to us today –

1. Be watchful
2. Endure afflictions
3. Do the work of an evangelist
4. Fulfill your ministry

Wise words indeed.

What will they not *endure*?

I think it's time to define the word *endure* since it's used six times in 2 Timothy.

The Greek word Paul used in 4:3 is ἀνέχομαι and it means *bear with, have patience with, forbear*.

The word Paul used in 1:8 and 2:3 is συγκακοπαθέω and means *to bear evil treatment, suffer hardship together with*.

The word Paul used in 2:10 and 2:12 is ὑπομένω and means *stand my ground, persevere, bear up against*.

The word Paul used in 3:11 is ὑποφέρω and means *bear up under, suffer*.

The word Paul used in 4:5 is κακοπαθέω and means *suffer affliction, endure suffering*.

Notice that the words used for Paul and Timothy's endurance concerned persevering, bearing up against, standing their ground, bearing evil treatment and suffering. That's different than the word Paul used for people listening to Timothy preach. They would not have patience with and bear with his preaching.

Endurance is different for Christians who stand their ground for the message of the Gospel and those who have no patience for that same message. What was the message?

What will they not *endure*?

Sound Doctrine

What is sound doctrine? Paul used the words ὑγιαίνω διδασκαλία, which mean *healthy teaching, pure and uncorrupted instruction*.

People then and now have no patience, no endurance, for the healthy and pure message of the Bible. That was the message Paul had preached, the message Timothy knew. The fact that Paul and Timothy both endured (suffered evil and afflictions) greatly from preaching that healthy, pure and uncorrupted message demonstrates the challenge we face today. Preachers and teachers who want to do the right thing and present the Word of God “rightly divided” (2 Timothy 2:15) will have to endure hardships because many of the people they preach to will “not endure sound doctrine.”

Why will they not *endure*?

Paul answered that question for us in the verses that follow –

“... but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”

2 TIMOTHY 4:3-4

There you have it – “but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears.”

If you are a preacher or teacher, you know what it’s like to present Bible Truth to people who *stare* or *glare* back at you. You often get a look of disinterest or disgust. Why? Because what you’re saying doesn’t fit in with what they *want*. You’re not appealing to their desires.

Paul chose to use the word ἐπιθυμία that is translated *desires*. The Greek word means *passionate longing, lust, inordinate desire*. Many of the people who sat in pews and chairs, and now watch online because of Covid-19, are not interested in listening

to teaching of the pure, uncorrupted Word of God. That doesn't meet their lustful desires. What does? *Fables*.

“and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”

Millions of people through the last 2,000 years have turned their ears away from the preaching of truth to the preaching of fables. Paul used the word *μῦθος*. It means *myth, idle tale, fanciful story, fable*. It's a false account that presents itself as the truth. It's a lie that takes the place of truth.

Notice that they will “be turned aside ...” The word Paul used is *ἀποστρέφω* and means *turn away, turn back, separate from, depart, reject, desert, pervert*. People who follow the preaching of fables have rejected and deserted the Truth. That turning away actually becomes a *perversion* of the message they once said they believed.

Any other reason why people who have sat under the preaching of the true Word of God would turn away from the Truth to myths that pervert the Gospel of Christ? We know their desires are passionate and lustful, but any other reason?

“because they have itching ears.”

Itching ears? The words are κνήθω τὴν ἀκοήν and speak to their desire for someone to tell them what they want to hear – to *tickle* their ears.

The healthy, pure, uncorrupted Truth of God’s Word does not tickle itching ears. God’s Word does not tell people what they *want* to hear. It tells them what they *must* hear.

That does not go over well with much of today’s church audience, so they do something about it. They “heap up for themselves teachers” who will tickle their ears. There are tens of thousands of false teachers around the world who are tickling people’s ears to make disciples for themselves. They have special skills in telling fables (myths) that feed people’s passionate desires.

The word “heap” is interesting. It’s used only once in the New Testament. The word is ἐπισωρεύω and means *to multiply, accumulate, heap upon*. Many of the people I’ve met through the years who want their ears tickled rather than hear the pure Word

of God listen to a large number of false teachers. They “heap up for themselves teachers” who will *tickle* their ears.

What do the false teachers get out of it? Followers. Fame. Fortune. They know that by giving the people what they want, the people will give them (the false teachers) what they want. You might think that everybody wins, but in reality everybody loses. The people lose and the false teachers they follow lose as well. Their future is not good.

Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy about three decades after Jesus was crucified and rose from the grave. The numbers of followers who attended churches at that time probably numbered in the thousands or tens of thousands. The numbers of people who claim to follow Jesus today number in the hundreds of millions.

Those numbers do not impress me. A majority now, even as when Paul wrote Timothy, have heaped up for themselves teachers who will *tickle* their ears. The number of people who desire to hear the healthy, pure, uncorrupted Truth of God’s Word is quite small in comparison.

We know this based on years of surveys and statistical research, but I think church leaders may be amazed at what their churches will look like when the pandemic finally ends. Tens of millions of “practicing” Christians (defined as people who attended church at least once a month prior to the pandemic) have moved on since the closing of churches because of the virus. Many of them will not return to any church. Others have surfed the Internet and found teachers online who *tickled* their ears. Where do you think they will attend church in the future? Correct. The churches of the *ear ticklers*.

What will happen to those who do not *endure*?

Paul addressed that at the beginning of his charge to Timothy –

“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.”

2 TIMOTHY 4:1

Those who will not *endure sound doctrine* will face the judgment of Jesus Christ at His appearing and His kingdom. The same is true for the false teachers who willingly tickled their ears. If they do not repent and believe the Gospel, **they will not endure.**

What's To Be Done About It?

As I wrote at the beginning of this article – “this is a rather sad story, but one we need to emphasize today. While there is some hope here, the battle is great and the time we have to fight is short.”

What has made me sad through the years is standing in front of people, teaching them the Truth, only to see their looks of disinterest and disgust. If you are a Bible teacher with the heart of a shepherd, you know how much it hurts. It hurts to see people turn away from truth to fables. It hurts to know that the judgment of Christ is coming soon and people you have taught personally may not do well in that judgment.

So, what can and should we do?

“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching ... be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.”

If you are a Bible teacher who loves the purity of God’s Word, keep preaching the Truth. Don’t quarrel with people who oppose you. Be gentle with them. Correct those who oppose you with a spirit of humility. Remember that the devil is actively involved in opposing your preaching. God may grant repentance to those who oppose you. He may not, but He may. That’s the hope that keeps us preaching and teaching even when it seems like there’s little reason to continue.

God is Sovereign. He is on His Throne. Don't give up. We will be judged by Christ on our faithfulness and endurance in the preaching of the pure Word of the Almighty God.

If you are a hearer of God's pure Word, don't give in to the passionate desire to have a false teacher tickle your ears. Remember that Jesus will return soon to judge. Some will receive penalty – some will receive reward.

Do the right thing.

Endure to the end.

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