

2 Timothy 4:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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;

Analysis

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.

Paul explains why faithful preaching is urgent. "For the time will come" (estai gar kairos, ἔσται γὰρ καιρός)—future tense prophesies coming apostasy. "When they will not endure sound doctrine" (hote tēs hygiainousēs didaskalias ouk anexontai, ὅτε τῆς ὑγιαίνουσῃς διδασκαλίας οὐκ ἀνέχονται). Anechomai (ἀνέχομαι) means endure, tolerate, put up with. Hygiainō (ὑγιαίνω) means be healthy, sound—the same word used in verse 3:16's context. They won't tolerate healthy teaching that convicts sin and demands holiness.

Instead, "after their own lusts" (kata tas idias epithymias, κατὰ τὰς ἰδίας ἐπιθυμίας)—according to their own desires, lusts, cravings. They want teaching that accommodates rather than confronts sinful desires. The result: "they shall heap to themselves teachers" (heautois episōreusousin didaskalous, ἑαυτοῖς ἐπισωρεύουσιν διδασκάλους). Episōreuō (ἐπισωρεύω) means pile up, accumulate in quantity. They'll amass numerous teachers who tell them what they want to hear, shopping for affirming voices rather than truth.

These teachers cater to "itching ears" (knēthomenoi tēn akoēn, κνηθόμενοι τὴν ἀκοήν). Knēthō (κνήθω) means itch, tickle—ears that want pleasant scratching, not corrective surgery. This describes consumer Christianity: treating church like religious marketplace where shoppers select teachers providing desired product

(affirmation, entertainment, prosperity promises) rather than submitting to authoritative Scripture that reproves and corrects.

Historical Context

Ancient sophists earned living by telling wealthy patrons what they wanted to hear, flattering rather than challenging. Some itinerant philosophers sold eloquent but empty speeches. Paul warns that churches will replicate this pattern: hiring preachers who affirm rather than confront, entertain rather than convict. History validates the prophecy: every era sees churches abandoning sound doctrine for culturally accommodated messages. Contemporary seeker-sensitivity, prosperity gospel, and therapeutic Christianity fulfill Paul's warning—heaping up teachers who tickle ears rather than proclaim truth.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. Do you evaluate preaching and teaching by whether it tickles your ears or faithfully expounds Scripture, even when uncomfortable?
2. In what areas might you be seeking teachers who affirm your preferences rather than submitting to sound doctrine that corrects you?
3. How can churches resist the consumer mentality that shops for affirming messages and instead pursue faithful biblical exposition?

Interlinear Text

ἔσται	γὰρ	καιρὸς	ὅτε	τῆς	ὑγιαίνουσης	διδασκαλίας	
will come	For	the time	when	G3588	sound	doctrine	
G2071	G1063	G2540	G3753		G5198	G1319	
οὐκ	ἀνέξονται	ἀλλὰ	κατὰ	τὰς	ἐπιθυμίας	τὰς	ἰδίας
not	endure	but	after	G3588	lusts	G3588	their own
G3756	G430	G235	G2596		G1939		G2398
ἑαυτοῖς	ἐπισωρεύουσιν	διδασκάλους	κνηθόμενοι	τὴν			
to themselves	shall they heap		teachers	having itching	G3588		
G1438	G2002		G1320	G2833			
ἄκοήν							
ears							
G189							

Additional Cross-References

Galatians 4:16 (Parallel theme): Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?

1 Timothy 1:10 (Parallel theme): For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine;

Jeremiah 5:31 (Parallel theme): The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?

Luke 6:26 (Parallel theme): Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.

Micah 2:11 (Parallel theme): If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people.

1 Kings 18:22 (Parallel theme): Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.

Isaiah 28:12 (Parallel theme): To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

Acts 17:21 (Parallel theme): (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

Jeremiah 29:8 (Parallel theme): For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed.

1 Corinthians 2:1 (Parallel theme): And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.