

Itching Ears

Reasons for False Teachings

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 18-Aug-01; Tape #516

Most of us, if not all of us, have heard these two expressions: (1) the tail wagging the dog, and (2) getting the cart before the horse. Nuances aside (what each one means in particular), they both have to do with suggesting that things are being done out of order, or backwards, or just not properly. Something is happening that should be done another way to produce a given result.

Let us say in a war, or in battle. A platoon of soldiers telling the officers what to do is the tail wagging the dog. It is the subordinates telling the leaders what they should do—rather than the leaders telling the subordinates what they should do. If you remember the movie that came out a few years back, called *Wag the Dog*, that was a depiction from a producer's mind (or a writer's mind) of a corrupt White House administration making news in order to get a policy across, rather than reality—what is really in the news, what is really going on "on the ground"—directing policy. It was backward. It was the tail wagging the dog.

"Getting the cart before the horse" implies skewed priorities—doing things the wrong way, getting the wrong thing first. A cart without a horse is virtually useless—unless you want to pull it yourself and that just creates a lot of work. But a horse alone, without the cart, still will be able to provide you with transportation and a limited amount of ability to carry whatever needs to be carried. You can still get jobs done with a horse that you cannot get done if all you have is a cart.

This is similar to Jesus' instruction to take the plank out of your own eye first, before you try to get the speck out of your brother's eye. It is far easier to see a speck when your own eye is clear. The understanding there is, "Do not judge someone for a fault that you have written all over your face yourself." So, when we do things in their proper order and at the proper time, our chances for success—in getting them done and reaching our goal—increases exponentially.

The same thing is true regarding preaching the truth. If we begin from the right point, if we do things in the proper order, we have a much better chance of reaching the goal—which is the Kingdom of God. Specifically, today we want to concentrate on the tail wagging the dog in terms of what is preached in the church. Who decides what should be preached as the gospel? Who determines what the truth is, and what of that truth is preached?

If this becomes inverted, if the tail wags the dog (in preaching the gospel, in preaching the truth), then it is the fault of both the ministry—who is allowing themselves to be led—and the laity—for leading in this area. As a matter of fact, the ministry does not determine what is preached. They too preach what they are told. The ministry is made up of men under authority. And so some of these things that can be applied, can be applied both to the laity and the ministry in terms of who determines what should be preached. I am not getting on to the membership at all about this. I just want to show you what can happen if the tail wags the dog in this respect.

Let us begin in Matthew 10. This is the section where Jesus is sending out His disciples to preach. He sent them out two by two; and He told them what to do, how to do it, and what to preach. He laid it all out for them. We are not necessarily going to focus on this; but I should mention that, in verse 7, He tells them to go out and preach the Kingdom of God. Just keep that in the back of your mind. That is what He told them to preach.

Matthew 10:11-15 "Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. And when you go into a household, greet it. [He means, be respectful and peaceable and do all of the necessary things to maintain good relations.] If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!"

I want you to notice what can be derived from this section. It talks mostly about how a minister is supposed to go out and approach preaching the gospel. But I want you to notice what He said here. If we want to distill it down, He is saying that the truth that you are to preach is non-negotiable. What He says is, "If you go into a town, and you find a worthy person to stay with, and you preach the gospel to them and they accept it—great, fine. Stay there and preach for as long as you need to. If they reject it, if they don't want it—fine, great. Pick up your things, dust off your pants, and go to the next town. As a minister of God, you are not going in there for the sake of numbers, or to see if the people will be kind to you, or to change the message so that the people will be kind to you, or for money, or whatever it happens to be."

The minister's job is to go in and preach the gospel. If the people accept it—great. If they do not accept it—well, we know what is coming. They will get their reward. So we do not have to waste our time in places where it is not going to be accepted. God does not want His ministers to waste their breath—to throw pearls before swine, as it were. He wants the ministry to go in and find those who accept the truth, who want to believe the truth, who are willing to support the truth, who want to help in getting the truth out. And if there are none there, go on. Do not waste your time. God has not called anyone there.

But the truth remains the same. The message must be preached, and it must not be changed. That is just the way it is. Jesus is pretty hard-nosed about this. Do not waste your time. Do not waste your breath on people who are not going to listen. That is just the way it is. A minister of God is not driven by numbers, is not driven by contributions. He should not be driven by anything that is going to make him look "good," necessarily. He is not in it for himself (or should not be). He is in it because he is to preach the gospel. That is what his Master has told him to do, and he is a man under authority.

Let us see this in the apostle Paul's life. Outside of Jesus Christ, Paul was probably the most dedicated servant of God ever. At least, that is the way I read it. And this is the way he let us know just what it meant to him to be God's apostle, or God's servant.

I Corinthians 9:16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!

I Corinthians 9:18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

We are not going to get into the specifics of why he had to say this to the Corinthian church. But I want you to see the attitude with which he presents his words here. Notice that he says that he had a need to preach the gospel. He says, "necessity is laid upon me." *I have got to preach this. And if I do not, I had better hide under a rock somewhere.* The way he approached it was that lightning could strike at any time, if he stopped preaching the gospel. Remember how Jesus started his ministry. He blinded him, out in the middle of the road. I am sure Paul thought about that often—and what would happen if he stopped doing the charge that had been laid upon him.

So, a true minister feels a compulsion to preach the gospel. On the other hand, he feels a certain doom if he does not. He feels like if he tried anything else he would be a fish out of water. There would be an emptiness that was not being filled—because the ministry of Jesus Christ is a *calling*. It is not just something we do for a paycheck. (Or, it should not be.) It is something that we feel compelled to do, because the truth must be preached. It cannot stay in our mind. That sort of knowledge, that sort of understanding, is absolutely useless for anybody else. It will not help anybody get even one more step along the road toward the Kingdom of God. That is why God gave ministers mouths to speak.

Paul calls it "the foolishness of preaching," but God accomplishes a great deal through it. And the man who is a serious, devoted servant of Jesus Christ must do it. He just must! It is almost like the man who is out of the desert and has not had anything to eat and drink. He feels compelled, obviously, to find something to eat and to drink—particularly to drink. That is the way a true minister of God feels if he has not preached the truth in a long while. There is just a "pressure" that builds up after a while. And if it is not released, it just booms. It has got to come out, because there is that compulsion from God Himself who is driving a true minister to speak the truth.

Now, I may be dramatizing it a bit. But I am doing that only to illustrate it. There is a feeling in a true minister's gut, let us say, to let other people know what he has been given in terms of the truth. The gospel will come out; let us say, in a true minister of God. On the other hand, what does he get out of it? What does Paul say that he got out of it? In verse 18, he said that what he got out of it was that, when he exploded with the truth, then other people were helped. He was able to preach the gospel in love, without charge. He did not need anything for it, because he was driven from the inside—not the outside. And it made him feel good. It relieved the pressure, let us say. And it gave him the feeling, the satisfaction, that he had done his job.

Let us go on to II Timothy 3, because there is another side to this. I have presented the positive side. Paul gives here, to Timothy, a list of instructions on how to be a faithful minister. That is, what the faithful minister needs to do—at least, let us say, in his responsibility to preach. Paul begins with his own example, and then he flows into this list of commands.

II Timothy 3:10 But you have carefully followed my doctrine. . . .

Remember that he had himself found Timothy, and took him around with him in his travel. In a way, Timothy had grown up under the wing of the apostle Paul. So, indeed, when he says that Timothy had followed his manner of life and doctrine and all of that—he really had, for quite a while. He was his protégé, we might say.

II Timothy 3:10-12 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. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

What he is doing is, in a way, saying, "You've seen what I've gone through, and you are going to follow in my footsteps. So you're going to face these things too. Not only the good things, but also the bad things. This is just part 'n parcel of the job."

II Timothy 3:13 But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

In a way, he is almost saying: "Look Timothy, things are getting worse—not better! So if I suffered like this, if you are really going to be faithful and dedicated to this ministry, then you may face even worse things than I." So a true minister must be very willing to make that sacrifice.

II Timothy 3:14-17 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.

He has just given Timothy a 'heads up' on how he will be able to face these things that are going to come upon him. Basically, he says "ground yourself in the Bible"—for out of the Bible will come your strength to do these things. I am not limiting it strictly to the words of the Bible, per se; but to the spirit and the inspiration behind them too. Obviously, God would be with him if he would do these things. But the constant inspiration and help that he would need would come out of the Scripture. By these things he would be able to remind himself of the truth and grow in it. He'd be able to be corrected by it, instructed by it, reprovved by it. All of these things are necessary in order to construct, or mold, the faithful minister. That is where his nose needs to be at all times, so that he has the proper foundation, motivation, inspiration, and resource for everything that he does.

II Timothy 4:1-2 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!

There is an exclamation point there, as it is in the New King James. That is a command if I have ever heard one. That is what a true minister is there for. That is his job. *Preach the Word!*

II Timothy 4:2 Be ready in season and out of season.

It does not matter what time of the year it is. If somebody needs the instruction, give it! Normally we would not speak about the evils of Christmas during July; but, if it is necessary, preach it! If we need to talk about the Feast of Tabernacles during the spring holy days, preach it! Of course, we would normally speak about the Feast of Tabernacles right near the Feast of Tabernacles. But we have to be ready at all times, armed, let us say, to speak about anything that pertains to God's Word and His way of life—at any time. You always give instruction when it is needed, and not just when it is routinely given by others.

II Timothy 4:2-5 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. But you [Timothy] be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Boy, he gave Timothy an awful lot to think about—and an awful lot to do. But notice that he ends with the warning that false teachers and false gospels are inevitable. As time goes on, like he said earlier, things are going to get worse and worse.

We have to be especially careful of that these days because Jesus told us that, as the end approaches, it is going to get really bad! Those things are going to wax, not wane, as the end comes. And I think that we have seen, in our information society, that not only have there been more but it is coming at us faster and faster and faster. It is hard to keep up with all the false things, the heresies, and the strange ideas. And those are just things that are in the church, and not the ones that come from Protestantism or Catholicism, New Age, or what have you.

The Internet has been a blessing and a curse, just for that reason. It is wonderful for transmitting information—especially if it is the truth. But it is damnable, on the other hand, for transmitting error. That is just the way all "media" of that sort are. Any kind of media can be used wrongly. Just like the Internet, it can be used wrongly. I think I read somewhere that the two biggest users on the Internet are (on the one hand) pornographers and (on the other hand) churches. Is that not crazy? But that just shows you how the times are, and how we have to be girded to be able to face those things, explain the truth, show the error of falsehood. It is not easy in these times to be a true minister of God, because things are coming at us from right and left—at 190 mph.

I want to look at the motivations behind the rise of false gospels and false teachings. Paul gives us, I believe it is four, different phrases to look into—to understand what is behind these things. The first one we find in II Timothy 4:3. It is the phrase "*according to their own desires.*" It says that the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires. This is the first one that he mentions, and it is probably the primary motivating factor behind error, false teaching.

A very simple way of defining this would be to replace it with the phrase "*what they want.*" According to what they want. We can all understand that. That is plain, simple Anglo-Saxon English. According to what they want, because they have itching ears, they will heap up to themselves teachers. It has the connotation of rejecting what does not agree with their personal

view and only accepting those things that agree with them. So, everything is filtered through their desires—what they want, what they want to get out of it.

This is very simple. It does not take a rocket scientist to understand this. We all have our point of view. We all have what we want to see, what we are looking for. It is kind of funny. People do not know this, and they say it in innocence; but sometimes people talk about coming into the church and they say, "This is just what I was looking for"—as if finally they found a church that agreed with them. Now, it would be much more spiritual, let us say, to say, "I finally found the truth." It is just the manner of speaking, but it is very interesting. And sometimes that is how God leads people. He gives them a desire for something, and they find it in the true church; and then they get instructed from there.

You see where I am headed with this? The desires, the wants, of a particular individual drive what he is going to believe—rather than *the truth* itself driving them to believe. It means that people judge what they hear by their lusts, by the whims, by their own self-concocted ideas. Their standard, then, is not what is right and good, but what suits them, or what feels good to them. Or, maybe, what maintains their comfort range or upholds the status quo so that they do not have their boats rocked in any way. So that they do not have to change and so that they feel comfortable and easy, do not have to change, do not have to repent, do not have to do anything. They just want a teacher that is going to pat them on the back and say "You're a good fellow."

Their quest is not an objective search for truth, but it is simply self-gratification. Jude mentions this. He is talking about apostates—heretics, let us say—those who are false teachers. He says:

Jude 16-19 These are grumblers [murmurers], complainers, walking according to their own lusts [That is almost the same phrase.]; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause division, not having the Spirit.

That is what happens eventually, because they are sensual persons. They are driven by their senses, what feels good to them, what pleases their eyes, what pleases their ears, what pleases their taste and smell and touch—rather than what pleases God. That is how they live. And over a long period of time, what Jude says here is true. It causes division. The people who are driven by their own lusts have different goals than the people who are driven by the Spirit. And so they end up in different places.

And what happens when people, who formerly walked together, end up in different places? At some point there was a fork in the road, and they were divided from one another—split. One went one way and one went the other. And so, if you have a congregation that is half walking by the Spirit and half walking according to their own lusts, I will bet you as much as you want to bet that half of that congregation are not going to be meeting with the other half of that congregation after a short while. That is just the way it works, because one half is walking according to their own desires and one is trying their best to walk according to God's. So it

causes division.

Let's go back to II Timothy 4 and look at the next phrase. This is interesting. "*Because they have itching ears.*" As a matter of fact, that is what I have entitled this sermon—"Itching Ears." It is just one part of it, but it is a catchy phrase. That is why I chose it. I am a tease, I guess, when it comes down to it. Being an editor, you have to have catchy titles. But itching ears is obviously a figure of speech. Literally in the Greek it means, "an itching in the ears."

Obviously, what this comes from is the almost unstoppable urge that we have to scratch when we itch. If you have an itch some place that you cannot reach, you find something or someone that will help you scratch it. Right? If you cannot reach that lower part of your back properly, or the upper part of your back, or the very middle of your back—what do you do? You find a backscratcher, or you lean up against the post, or you say, "Honey, right here please." You do something in order to have yourself satisfied and to make that itch go away, because (like I said) it is almost unstoppable.

Paul says that this itching is in the ears. What would satisfy an itching sensation in the ears? It is words—words that appeal. What happens when you have broken your leg, and you have a cast from your ankle up to your thigh, and you have an itch right behind your knee? There is just no way to satisfy that itch. And then let us say that somebody—an inventor of some sort—came up with a device that would get between that cast and your skin. You could direct it down to that place where you itch, and it would scratch it for you.

What would that produce in the person who has the cast? First of all, he would be awfully relieved. Secondly, he would do anything for the person who helped him. "Ahhhhh. Great. What do you want? Here's my bank account. Take whatever's in the house." We probably would not go that far. But what it does is that it produces a loyalty to the person who satisfies the itch. There is also gratitude, obviously. But they all work together. All the feelings that one feels towards this other person, who satisfied you in scratching this itch, would produce loyalty to that person. "He can't be bad if he helped me through this certain problem." (In this case, an itch that could not be satisfied until he came along.) So that person is given the benefit of the doubt. He becomes your buddy, and you will stick with him through thick and thin.

This is behind this idea of wanting their ears scratched. That is, having itching ears. Have you ever noticed that there are hundreds of remedies for hiccups? Have you noticed that, if a person gets hiccups fairly frequently, they almost swear by a certain remedy that works for them? Some people will use rhythmic breathing to try to get their diaphragm back into proper functioning order. Other people will try holding their nose for a long period of time until they just have to take a breath. Other people will try things a little bit more unusual—let us say, like standing on their heads, or drinking out of the opposite side of the glass, or whatever it takes. Another good one is to have someone scare you. There are just all kinds of different remedies for getting rid of hiccups. But when a person finds one that works for him, he becomes loyal to it. "That always works for me." And then he goes around telling everybody else, "Why don't you try this. It's always worked for me, and I'm sure it will work for you."

Well, it is the same way with getting your ears scratched—spiritually. Let us go to Jeremiah 5. I think it is very interesting, the way that God writes this. The interesting part is, I think, in the

first lines here.

Jeremiah 5:30-31 "An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: [Now remember that this has to do with having our ears scratched.] The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?"

You probably have never put this scripture together with having "itching ears." But the idea is here. There is something in the way these prophets speak, something in what they say, something in the way that the leaders rule, that satisfies the people so that they love it. They would not have it any other way. They are willing to take the abuse. They are willing to be lied to, because something there in the message satisfies them. It scratches the itch in their ears.

We know, of course, that basically what is happening here is that they have been allowed to do pretty much what they want. And they will gladly take that, and all the abuse, because they are freed then from obeying God. What the people who scratch the itch have done is given them license to do whatever they jolly well please. So they are willing to take whatever the prophets, of the leader, the king, or whatever dishes out in order to do whatever feels good to them.

And obviously God is right when He says, "This is a horrible thing." And it is astonishing to Him, because He can see that it produces destruction and death quickly. Society crumbles. Wars happen. Famines and natural disasters come as a result of these sorts of things. It says, back in the Pentateuch, that WHEN these things begin to hit their peak THEN the land vomits them out. It will not support immorality. It will not support people having their itches scratched—because it is wrong. It is against everything that God has set up to work in a certain way. It goes against the very laws of nature.

Remember who is in control here. God is still in control. He set up the laws. And when these things begin to happen, things go from bad to worse incredibly fast. And it all begins because people have certain desires and because they want certain itches scratched. These are the two things, then, that Paul refers to as the foundation of false doctrine. So when the preacher is out there saying "Love, love, love" and "no law," everybody stands up and says, "Hey, he's our man!" because he has just allowed them to do just what they pleased. And the people love to have it so.

How astonishing and horrible that is from God's point of view. On the other hand, the people of God—whose motivation is to please Him, to have eternal life, to be sons of God in His Kingdom—just have to shake their heads and troop on, as society goes down and down and down. That is where we are today, unfortunately.

The *Revised English Bible* translates *having itching ears* as "to tickle the fancy." This shows its commonality with the first phrase—"according to their own desires." It is to place our feelings and desires above the truth. In a way, this is a Hebraism—where one phrase parallels the next. "Walking according to their own desires" and "having itching ears" are kind of like those two expressions that I opened the sermon with: "the tail wagging the dog" and "getting the cart before the horse." They do not mean the same thing exactly; but they are two expressions that, at their root, have the same meaning. So, having their itches scratched means very much the same as "according to their own desires"—because someone satisfies a person who has a

certain desire for a thing.

It occurs when people place their feelings and desires above the truth. It is wanting to be personally gratified or satisfied, rather than being actually taught what is true. There is another example of this in Ezekiel 33. This is what we have called "the watchman chapter." It is interesting that it is in this chapter, because this is basically what we are talking about here. The true minister is supposed to be a watchman, and he is supposed to warn the people and give them the truth no matter what. And if he does, then he is guiltless. No blood is on him for anybody else's refusal to believe it. But then we come down to verses 30-33; and God basically tells the watchman—His true minister of God—that his success rate is not going to be that good.

Ezekiel 33:30 "As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, 'Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.'"

So, if you want to make a splash, people may be talking about him; but what are the long term results?

Ezekiel 33:31 "So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain."

It sounds just like what Paul told Timothy.

Ezekiel 33:32-33 Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them. And when this comes to pass—surely it will come to pass—then they will know that a prophet has been among them."

I think this happens quite a bit. Just our recent past (perhaps the last quarter of a century or so, or maybe before then), people love to hear a good sermon and to be entertained. They love the oratory, let us say. Or they thought a certain guy was just the cat's meow, as far as being able to speak. He was the funniest guy. Every time you heard one of his sermons, you just laughed, laughed, laughed (like you were at a Steve Martin concert, or what have you). And there really were some that were like that. Every phrase, every sentence that came out of their mouth, was funny. You could have a great time.

It was like going to a violin concert. You can enjoy the music. But after you get up and leave the concert hall, what good is it? That is what God tells Ezekiel is how His people ("My people," He says.) treat Him. They wanted to hear what God had to say. They wanted to see Ezekiel go lie down on his side for 390 days. They wanted to know what kind of things God was going to have Ezekiel do next. Who knows, maybe he would be strung up by his toes for a week or two—until God spoke to him again? I do not know. Maybe people were approaching it that way."I wonder what God's going to have Ezekiel do next? I bet He'll have him hopping around the stage on one foot." That is what Ezekiel did. Not that one particularly, but God showed through Ezekiel doing certain things what He was going to do to Israel. And I am sure this was a spectacle for the people. "What crazy thing is Ezekiel going to do next?" And that is all they

wanted to see.

Maybe he was a good speaker. Maybe he could really "give it to 'em." Some people love hell fire and brimstone sermons. They feel totally wrung out at the end, and it is satisfying—like they have just been knocked up the side of the head, and set straight. But why do hell fire and brimstone sermons need to be preached so often? The people love to hear the song, but they do not want to dance the dance—if you catch my metaphor.

So it all comes back to the questions: Why are we in God's church? What are our fundamental reasons for being here? Are we seeking satisfaction for ourselves? Are we having an itch scratched? What are our motivations? Do we think the sermons at one particular place are better than at another particular place—just because the speakers happen to be better? Or, of course, the best motivation is because one is seeking the truth—one is seeking to please God.

Let us go back to II Timothy 4. Here is another phrase. "*Heap up to themselves teachers.*" This is another interesting mental illustration. Maybe a way that we might explain it today, or a phrase we might use, is that they have got a whole smorgasbord of preachers that they choose from. We would not say that they heap them up, because that is kind of funny. We would think of all these bodies piled up, one upon another. We would probably look at it more like a cafeteria, to use a generic phrase, where we go in and we pick this guy's understanding of marriage and then we go down a little bit, and we pick out this guy's understanding of faith, and then we go down a little further and for dessert we pick up this guy's really wonderful sense of humor.

Is that what we do? Do we dabble a little here, dabble a little there? We fool ourselves sometimes by saying, "Well, I'm just getting a well rounded approach to the subject" (or to whatever), "because this guy is really strong in this area; and I need what he's got to give me." Are we heaping up for ourselves teachers, so that we can pull one out from the bottom of the pile when we happen to need it? I am just asking a question.

Does one flit from place to place as the mood suits him? Maybe this week he is in the mood for something really sober, and so he goes to this particular place. This week he wants fellowship and the people at the sober place are not really good on fellowship; but the people at this other place really have a rip-roaring time after service every week, and I think I will go there that week. And then the next week, he heard that "X, Y, Z" is in town; and so let us go there. Is that the way it is? That is very much like "heap up to themselves teachers." Let us go to James 1:8. We are just going to touch upon this, and just pull out the principle.

James 1:8 He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Is that not true? You cannot trust a person, really, because he is unstable if he flits from here to there. You never know what corner he is going to be in that week.

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

I just wanted to pull out the principle here. God is interested in a certain thing called loyalty. He wants us to be loyal to Him, and to those through whom He is speaking. So it is best, for our

own growth, to find one and stick to it. And then you will not be guilty of heaping up to oneself teachers—because the basic driving motivation of doing such is *self-satisfaction*. And how often does that get one into trouble?

The next phrase is "*turn from the truth to fables.*" (II Timothy 4: 4) Once people reject the truth, or decide for themselves what the truth is, what do you have? What is left? What does that produce? Fables, myths, man-made wisdom, unsound teaching. It is not the pure truth from God. And that is why He says, "They turn their ears away from the truth and are turned aside to fables."

Fables here is just a general catch word for anything that is not the truth. When you are not focused on God and the ones He has sent to preach the truth, then you are dabbling in error. Remember what Mr. Armstrong said when he talked about what happens when you pour poison into a drink? What does it become? Is it a drink any longer? It is poisoned! Any amount of poison in that drink means that it is no longer pure. It is poisoned. And any truth that has error mixed up within it is error. That is a hard thing, but God wants His truth preached pure. So, we have to be careful that we do our best to feed ourselves the pure unadulterated truth. Otherwise, we will find ourselves turned away to fables, to myths, to man-made wisdom, to a false gospel.

Let us go to Romans 1, and I will just read through it. Paul gives a very quick summary of what happens when truth and error are mixed.

Romans 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

To take something from the *X-Files*—the truth is out there. That is basically what he says. They are without excuse, because everything is right there.

Romans 1:21-25 Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

What he is saying is that the truth is known. But what men have done is that they have suppressed the truth—in certain places in part, and in certain places almost fully. What they have done is that they have added their own "wisdom" to the mix. They have made, then, their own religion. Why? It satisfies them in some way. And God just says, "Okay. If that's the way you want it, go ahead." It is kind of like Jesus' attitude to those people who reject the truth. "Shak
"Shake the dust off your feet and go somewhere else." The same God who did this, told His

disciples to act that way towards those rejected the truth. "I'll deal with them later."

The greater point that I want to get out of here is the way that they did it. They suppressed the truth, and they added their own little bit of their own wisdom (or what have you); and they became fools because they believe a lie. They thought that they could come up with a religion that was better than the true religion. And they will pay for it. But we have to be careful that does not happen ourselves.

11 Thessalonians 2:9-12 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

That goes right back to what Paul said as the foundational reason for false gospels, for false teachings. It is that last line there. They had pleasure in unrighteousness. It was according to their own lusts. They wanted their itches scratched, and so they went ahead and believed the lie—Satan's lie. So, God is very clear—at least, to me it is very clear—that we must accept the whole truth and nothing but the truth. And we could even say, "So help me God."

So, what did Christ establish as what should be taught in the churches? We have to see, first of all, back in John 1:17 that what Christ brought—in what we consider to be the New Testament era—is not at all contradictory or fundamentally different from what the Old Testament teaches. In fact, it is not contradictory at all. His message is *complementary*. It completes the teaching of the Old Testament. What He brought rounded out and finished God's revelation to mankind.

John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

The word "but" here has been inserted by the translators. In most Bibles that use this convention, it is in *italics*—which means that it is a word that has been added by the translators to clarify what they believe is the sense. Now, why did they choose "but"? Well, their fundamental belief is that Jesus Christ came and changed what was taught by Moses. But if they had just put together what the rest of the New Testament says, Jesus came and *added to* and *completed* what Moses and the other prophets gave. There is a word that should better be placed there, and it is "and." The law was given through Moses and grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. They are complementary, not contradictory.

I have explained this concept before in other sermons—particularly the first two that I did on tithing. I just wanted to go back to this, to touch on it.

Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."

Remember the illustration that I gave about the candy jar, and it was only filled an inch. That was to illustrate what Moses taught, and what Moses gave in the law. But what Jesus did was to fill the rest of the candy jar full. I compared the one-inch of candy at the bottom to the law, and the rest of it to the spirit of the law. Jesus Christ *filled to the full* the revelation of God—of

Himself. And that is how we have to think of it. Maybe I should even use the word "supplementary"—complementary and supplementary, both.

When you think about it, what Moses gave in the law was the law of the Kingdom of God. It cannot be separated from the gospel of the Kingdom of God that Jesus brought—because the Kingdom of God needs law to function. It is a real thing. It has to work. And it is only going to work through the law and, of course, grace. They go hand in hand.

Matthew 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matthew 4:23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kind of disease among the people.

Matthew 9:35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

Matthew 10:7 "And as you go, preach, saying 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

Matthew 24:14 "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."

Luke 4:43 But He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent."

Luke 8:1 Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him.

Luke 9:2 He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

Luke 9:60 Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."

Luke 16:16 "The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it."

Now, did you get the idea that Jesus Christ came *preaching the Kingdom of God*? Did you get the idea that was what He wanted to be preached at all times? It certainly looks that way to me. It was His only focus! He said He had to go and preach to other cities the Kingdom of God; and He sent His disciples out, and He said, "You preach the Kingdom of God." And this next verse that we will go to is really going to show you how much the Kingdom of God was on His mind.

Acts 1:1-3 The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

Even after He died, He could not wait to get back and tell them more and more and more and

more and more about the Kingdom of God, which then He would send them out to preach. He was not finished yet, by the time that He had died; and so He appeared to them during forty days time, to give them more instruction. If we could say such of Him, He was "possessed" with the idea of preaching the Kingdom of God. And He instilled that in His apostles, as we saw in the apostle Paul. And it was not just Paul, but also some of the others—but mostly Paul.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

Acts 19:8 And he [Paul] went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.

Acts 20:25 "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more.

Acts 28:23 So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.

Acts 28:31 Preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

I think it is pretty plain—what the apostles also preached. They preached it with the same zeal as their Master who had given them the example. It is very plain, I think, to those who have ears to hear that the gospel of the Kingdom is the gospel. Why did Christ not call it something else?

If you want to go through and make a study of this, every time the word *gospel* comes up—if Jesus qualifies the word at any point—it is always of the Kingdom of God or of the Kingdom of heaven. That is what He preached! He preached the coming of a great Kingdom that was going to turn this world upside down and establish His Father's rule over all things.

That is what He *lives* for—and I use that in the present tense purposely. He still lives for it! And I am sure He is just anxious to come back and finish His work—this time as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And that is the gospel—the same message—that His ministry **MUST** teach. We must preach the Kingdom of God.

We know that grace, and peace, and salvation, and Christ's own life and example are certainly part of that preaching; but the primary thrust is the Kingdom of God. Our hope of being resurrected and changed to be part of that Kingdom, and all of the things that will come because of it, and with it, and in the future will all come about because *the gospel of the Kingdom* is the focus. And that is how God works through human, physical, fleshly people. He gives them the gospel, and He sends them out; and it must be preached. It is by that that salvation comes.