

Articles and Sermons :: 5 Signs of Ear-Tickling Preachers by Michael Brown

5 Signs of Ear-Tickling Preachers by Michael Brown - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2014/6/10 17:29

Paul warned Timothy that the "time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

That warning proved true in Timothy's day, and it has proved true many times since, especially today, when we have a multitude of ear-tickling preachers. How can we recognize them?

We know that deception is very deceiving and that no one is willingly duped. And we know that no one stands up and says, "What I'm teaching is false doctrine meant to deceive and destroy you!"

We also know that it is arrogant for any one of us to think that we alone have sound doctrine while everyone else is in error.

Yet Paul did not warn Timothy in vain, nor is he warning us in vain, and so we must ask ourselves what, exactly, are the distinguishing characteristics of ear-tickling preachers.

1. Ear-tickling preachers bypass self-denial and the cross. Jesus told His disciples that if anyone wanted to follow Him, they had to deny themselves and take up the cross (see Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; in Luke 9:23 He says we must take up our cross daily). And Paul taught that "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24).

Saying no to self and taking up the cross "meaning, giving up the claim to our own lives, dying to this sinful world and renouncing its claims" is a fundamental part of discipleship. Yet ear-tickling preachers will not talk about it.

The reason is obvious: It is not what our flesh wants to hear.

2. Ear-tickling preachers go light on sin. Throughout the Scriptures, both Old Testament and New Testament, including the Gospels, Acts, the Letters, and Revelation, there are warnings about the dangers of sin and calls to turn away from sin.

Of course, it is absolutely true that through the death and resurrection of Jesus and by the power of the Spirit we have been given victory over sin. And it is absolutely true that the message of grace, rightly understood, turns us away from sin (see Titus 2:11-14).

But that doesn't mean that as leaders, we no longer need to warn our hearers about the deceitfulness of sin or urge them to be vigilant against sin. To the contrary, because so much grace has been given to us, our responsibility before God is even greater (see Hebrew 2:1-4; 10:26-31; 12:25-29).

3. Ear-tickling preachers are loved by the world. In 2 Timothy 3, Paul recounted the persecutions and suffering he endured for the gospel "they were frequent and intense" and then said, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:12-13).

Jesus said that the world would treat us the way it treated Him (John 15:18; Matthew 10:24-25) and that His disciples, like the prophets of old, would be persecuted for righteousness sake (Matthew 5:10-12).

"If you were of the world," He said, "the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:19).

But the world doesn't hate ear-tickling preachers because they are "of the world" in their approach to the gospel.

It is one thing to have a good reputation for integrity and purity and to live out what we preach. It is another thing when o

ur message does not offend sinners. As Jesus warned, "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26).

4. Ear-tickling preachers tell the flesh what it wants to hear. The Old Testament prophets had to deal with this all the time. As Isaiah wrote long ago, "For they are a rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD; who say to the seers, 'Do not see,' and to the prophets, 'Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.'" (Isaiah 30:9-11)

In other words, "Don't make us uncomfortable, preacher! Don't make us squirm! Stop confronting us with the standards of a holy God!"

A friend recently shared with me that he learned that the owner of a local strip club was attending the same church that he and his family attended.

His sister-in-law approached the pastor and asked him about it, and the pastor said, "At least he's coming to church. That's better than not coming at all."

That would be true, except that the pastor never said a word about sin and never said anything that would make the man uncomfortable about his exploitation of young women (and others). And so rather than this man getting convicted of his sins and discovering the life-changing love of God, he went home deceived.

Ultimately, my friend and his family had to leave.

5. Ear-tickling preachers get away from the Word and give way to myths. They may use a verse or two in their preaching, but their sermons are driven by their own worldly ideology – especially if it sells – rather than by the content of the Word.

Some even get into the realm of complete fantasy, preaching alleged heavenly or angelic revelations that titillate the ears of the pseudo-spiritual but do not exalt Jesus, do not turn people away from sin, and do not produce lasting spiritual fruit.

I personally believe there are preachers today who genuinely know the Lord but have bought into a lie about the nature of the gospel, and while they think they are helping people, they are really hurting them in the long run.

May God grant these men and women repentance – especially those who actually are charlatans and deceivers – and may God give us discernment, repentance, and a love for the truth, regardless of cost or consequence.

from: <http://www.charismanews.com/opinion/in-the-line-of-fire/44176-5-signs-of-ear-tickling-preachers>

Re: 5 Signs of Ear-Tickling Preachers by Michael Brown - posted by TMK (), on: 2014/6/10 18:21

Tremendously good.

#5 perfectly describes the Bill Johnson/Bethel movement. I was part of that very briefly and this is why we left.

Re: - posted by Solomon101, on: 2014/6/11 10:10

While I wholeheartedly agree with Michael Brown's listed traits of "Ear Tickling Preachers" it also seems to me that the most clear trait is not listed at all.

Actually slow down and read Paul's words to Timothy again -

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 2 Tim 4:3-4 ESV

If you will notice the verses are not actually dealing with the teachers. It is an accusation against the people in the pew,

if you will.

In verse 2 Paul had told Timothy, "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching."

Verses 3-4 reveal that the people in the church will eventually not accept his message and will respond as indicated there.

Let's break those verses down a bit. Paul told Timothy that the people they were speaking to would eventually-

1. ... not endure sound teaching... (the people won't put up with it even though Timothy would give it).
2. having itching ears THEY WILL ACCUMULATE FOR THEMSELVES teachers to SUIT THEIR OWN PASSIONS, (Do you see that? The "itching ear teachers" are recruited by the people for their own desires!)"
3. (They, the people in the pew) will turn away from listening to the truth
4. (They will then) wander off into myths.

These verses actually have very little to say about the teacher doing the ear tickling. An honest reading of them in the context of proceeding verses makes it clear that Paul is warning Timothy that the people will eventually reject sound teaching. In fact they WANT to have an easier "ear tickling" message.

The most obvious sign of an "Ear Tickling Preacher" is not listed. From the content of the verses the number one sign of an "Ear Tickling Preacher" is that a group of people has recruited him to say what they want to hear!

One truth seems inescapable from this set of verses. The only reason "ear tickling teachers" exist is because that is what the people demand. If the people wanted the things Paul listed to Timothy in the proceeding verses that is what they would have. However, Paul specifically said that the people would not endure it! The people would get teachers to say what they wanted to hear.

A better descriptor than the "Signs Of Ear Tickling Preachers" for this set of verses might be "The Signs Of A People Who Won't Hear Anything But What Their Personal Desires Dictate" or how about... "The People Find Their Hireling".

TMK stated,

Quote:

-----#5 perfectly describes the Bill Johnson/Bethel movement. I was part of that very briefly and this is why we left.

I take it that you then also agree that they are innocent of the first 4 charges. In essence they-

1. DO NOT teach people to bypass self-denial and the cross but embrace it.
2. DO NOT go light on sin
3. ARE NOT generally loved by the world.
4. DO NOT tell the flesh what it wants to hear. (They do not excuse rebellion to God, His Word, or gloss over sinful actions)

I know these 4 things to be true of Bethel,

I am personally hesitant to throw stones at a group that teaches people to live lives of self denial, embracing the cross, strongly confronting sin, are not generally loved by the world, and are not telling the flesh what it wants to hear.

Did you notice in Paul's words to Timothy that it WAS NOT the teachers that he warned about wandering off into fables or leading people into that. IT WAS THE PEOPLE that turned from listening to truth by their own free choice to do so. A gain-

Quote:

----- (They) will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

He didn't even say that the ear tickling preachers were the promoters of the fables/myths the people wandered off into.

He simply said that when the people turned from truth they would wander off into myths as a result.

"Ear Tickling Preachers" are there for one reason according to these verses.

The people did not want to hear the truth so they recruited some folks to say what they wanted to hear. The real problem is not with the "Ear Tickling Preacher" according to these verses. The real problem is the hearts of the people.

Re: - posted by ZekeO (), on: 2014/6/11 10:58

Ear tickling as correctly defined here by Solomon happens in many groupings that think they have the inside lane on Gods Truth, including Sermonindex.

Re: - posted by Solomon101, on: 2014/6/11 14:30

Hi ZekeO ,

You stated

Quote:

Ear tickling as correctly defined here by Solomon happens in many groupings that think they have the inside lane on Gods Truth, including Sermonindex

Astutely observed. You are spot on.

It seems when a group is doing this they are almost irretrievably blind to it. They are convinced they have the inside lane on God's truth and nothing will dissuade their zeal on the issue. As you mentioned that happens to many groups of people. It has been seen all over Christendom as well as here on the boards at times.

In fact if we want to go just a bit deeper there are those whose ears are only tickled if some ministry or person is being attacked. They don't have much response to anything else. However, just post a heresy hunting video and they are all over that. Never mind if the vast majority of that video is inaccurate and flat out falsehood. It's what their ears are itching to hear!

In my experience few people are as dangerous as a "christian" who knows they are right and everyone else is wrong.

Re: - posted by TMK (), on: 2014/6/11 15:20

Solomon--

I was making no comment about bethel and the other points and of course others apply as well as #5. 5 just stuck out.

And while persons demand ear ticklers this obviously is no excuse for ear tickling and the purported man of God who is an ear tickler will have much to answer for.

Dr Brown is not giving hearers of ear ticklers a pass, rather he is warning about what ear ticklers sound like. Some persons may have no idea what one sounds like for any number of reasons.

Re: - posted by Solomon101, on: 2014/6/12 9:06

Hey TMK-

I fully understood Michaels Brown's points. That's why I stated

Quote:

-----While I whole heartedly agree with Michael Brown's listed traits of "Ear Tickling Preachers"

I also greatly respect his ministry. No one on this board has more genuine respect than I do for the ministry Michael has accomplished over the decades.

However, I was drawing attention to the fact that there was a singular reason for the rise of "ear tickling preachers" contained in the proof text he used. Ironically that singular reason/sign given by Paul was not listed in Michael's signs of them.

In fact the verses used in Timothy do not tell you what the "Signs Of An Ear Tickling Preacher" are at all. Did you catch that in those verses? They do not list any of the points that Michael Brown made. Again, I stated that I generally agree with them. However, you cannot find even one of the points in the proof text he used.

Actually if you will read the verse again it NEVER ONCE SAYS ANYTHING about the teacher actually tickling their ears. It actually says "having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions". That is the point I was making. There is no "ear tickling preacher" even mentioned. It is the person in the pew who has those ears and they accumulate for themselves someone to say what they want.

It is wisdom to let a scriptural verse actually interpret itself rather than forcing a meaning on it that isn't there. That is my point. The verses are crystal clear. Ear tickling teachers only exist because of the hearts of the people that will have nothing else. I will repost those verses in context of the previous ones that show why they go down that path.

The PRIMARY, and ONLY, listed reason for ear tickling preachers in those verses is the hearts of people turning from the truth and after their own passions. Do you see it? According to those proof texts he listed it is NOT the ear tickling teacher that produces the error in the people's hearts. It is the people's hearts that DESIRE error. They then recruit a teacher to say what they want to hear .. or their ears are tickling for. Without the people wanting to have it that way the ear tickling preacher would not exist. Those scriptures are plain. If you hear an ear tickling preacher it is for one reason. He has been recruited by those people to preach what they want to hear. THAT is the primary sign according to those scriptures.

Quote:
-----I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. - 2 Tim 4:1-4 ESV

CAPS used for specific word emphasis only. No yelling was intended.

Re: - posted by TMK (), on: 2014/6/12 9:25

We are on the same page I believe. But I think that vv 1-2 of the passage is, in essence, an admonition to Timothy not to be an ear tickling preacher.

I agree with your points about the passage.

But I do think it is possible for at least some persons to be listening to ear ticklers without knowing any better. For example, I am sure that there are at least some persons who have come to saving faith in Joel Osteens church. Perhaps that is the only church they have ever attended and don't know any better. I think it would be improper to say they are desiring to have their ears tickled; they are just ignorant on the matter.

Re: - posted by Solomon101, on: 2014/6/12 9:46

Hey TMK-

I agree that we are on the same page.

I was just drawing a little closer look at the proof text. However, as I stated I fully agree with the signs Michael posted. In retrospect when I put the actual emphasis of the verses with the signs Michael Brown listed I could probably have approached it a little more clearly.

Let me try it this way. It may not be any more clear but just for my own benefit I will approach it this way by meshing the two.

WHAT PEOPLE WITH "ITCHING EARS" WANT TO HEAR PREACHED

1. A message free of self denial and the cross
2. A message that goes light on sin
3. The messages preached by a person that is loved by the world (a "popular" pastor)
4. A message that tells their flesh what it wants to hear. It comforts their sin.
5. A message that is short on scripture and long on opinions and myths. (I call this the "gospel" of Oprah and Dr. Phil.)

If you hear a teacher that speaks in this way you can be assured he is an "ear tickling teacher". You may further be confident that he has been employed by a people who want to have their ears tickled with this sort of message.

Maybe that is closer communication of the balance of all the parts.

I agree with your thoughts that a person could innocently be part of the "ear tickling" group. They simply may not have much, if any, scriptural knowledge. They could be a new convert, never grown spiritually, a church attender that is not actually born again, etc.

I always enjoy Michael Brown's writings. This one is a springboard to a particularly good and timely discussion.

Re: - posted by MrBillPro (), on: 2014/6/12 10:28

Quote:
-----Solomon101..In my experience few people are as dangerous as a "christian" who knows they are right and everyone else is wrong.

Amen! Amen! and another Amen! these folks make ear ticklers look like the 5 year old class of Sunday school teachers.
:)

Re: , on: 2014/6/12 14:22

Quote:
-----Solomon101..In my experience few people are as dangerous as a "christian" who knows they are right and everyone else is wrong.

Well that would be a majority of us on this forum then wouldn't it:)