

DISCERNING EARS RATHER THAN ITCHING EARS

“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 . . .”—2 Timothy 4:3 (ESV)

In this letter to Timothy, Paul warns of the proclivity of many of us to seek teachers who tell us what we want to hear, especially relating to matters of Christian doctrine. Paul notes that such persons “accumulate for themselves” these types of instructors. (The King James translation renders these words: “heap to themselves.”) In other words, in an effort to bolster self-justification, sinful individuals seek multiple teachers to confirm their flawed judgments.

Unfortunately, we live in an era when finding an abundance of “experts” to validate sinful thoughts and behavior is all too easy. As Saint Paul forecast, enduring truth has fallen out of fashion.

In 1930, Fulton Sheen, radio preacher on NBC’s *Catholic Hour*, observed that modern thinkers, both religious and secular, taught “with unbuttoned pride that there is no such thing as Truth with a capital ‘T,’ for Truth is ambulatory: we make it as we go; it depends on the Time in which we live.” Somehow, Sheen added, people had forgotten that “Truth is not our making, but God’s.”

One of the ways that “ambulatory” truth is most noticeable is in our modern practice of decommissioning the term “sin” and downplaying or rationalizing its various manifestations. In a world in which fallen humans need to repent, the inclination to explain away violations of God’s Law is perilous to souls and to society, the consequences of which were temporal and eternal. Fulton Sheen’s fellow radio sermonizer, Walter Maier on *The Lutheran Hour*, noted (also in 1930): “You will find that the short, three-letter word *sin* has been deleted from many modern vocabularies and that short, three-word sentence ‘I have sinned’ is one of the hardest confessions to wring from proud human lips.”

There’s a difference between what we want to hear and what we need to hear. Sound teaching makes our sinfulness clear. Sound teaching also rescues us by pointing us to Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, I am a sinner. Help me to repent daily and trust in Your redeeming work, rather than deny the reality of my transgressions. Thank you for Your grace. Amen.

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