

Sound Doctrine

by Bryan Gibson

“Sound doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:10; 2 Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1), or “sound words” (1 Timothy 6:3; 2 Timothy 1:13)—that’s how the gospel is described in these letters to Timothy and Titus. “Sound” is from the Greek word, *hugiaino*, which means “to be sound, to be well, to be healthy” (Thayer and Smith). This word is sometimes used to describe physical health (Luke 7:10—“well”; 3 John 1:2—“health”), but in the passages cited above, it clearly has a spiritual application. Let’s stay in these letters to Timothy and Titus to see what else is said about this description of the gospel.

Jesus Christ is the sole source of sound doctrine. “If anyone...does not consent to wholesome (sound) words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (1 Timothy 6:3). These “words” would include, of course, the words Jesus spoke through His apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:1-5), words preserved for us in the New Testament.

We should be careful, then, to teach and practice only the doctrine of Christ. The only way we can be “sound in the faith” (Titus 1:13) is to “speak...sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1), and then practice what we preach. Preach sound doctrine, even when “they will not endure sound doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2-3); “hold fast the pattern of sound words” (2 Timothy 1:13); “continue in the things which you have learned” (2 Timothy 3:14)—these are the instructions Paul gave Timothy. Paul did commend Timothy, because at least to that point, he had “carefully followed” sound doctrine (1 Timothy 4:6), and that’s the commendation we should all seek.

Religious doctrine can have only one other source, man, but it’s impossible to follow man’s teaching and still be sound in the faith. Mix with the doctrine of Christ the “commandments of men” (Titus 1:14), and the result is unsound doctrine—no matter how wise it sounds, no matter how much it helps the church to “grow,” and no matter how popular it may be to the masses. “Rebuke them sharply”—that’s what Paul told Titus to do to these mixers (Titus 1:13-14). And his instructions to Timothy were no less serious—“Charge some that they teach no other doctrine” (1 Timothy 6:3); “If anyone teaches otherwise...withdraw yourself” (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

Sound doctrine has a practical aim; in fact, sound (healthy) doctrine is the only doctrine that produces true spiritual health, because it’s the only doctrine that “accords with godliness” (1 Timothy 6:3; Titus 1:1). Godliness, righteousness, love, faith, reverence, submissiveness, patience, self-control, etc. (1 Timothy 1:5; Titus 2:1-12)—only one who is “nourished” (1 Timothy 4:6) in sound doctrine will produce these fruits in their highest and purest form.

On the other hand, unsound doctrine ruins spiritual health (2 Timothy 2:14). Change, add to, or take from sound doctrine and there will be some ugly fruit—unnecessary disputes, envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, greed, ungodliness, etc. (1 Timothy 1:3-4; 6:3-12; 2 Timothy 2:14-18). Bottom line—sound (healthy) doctrine makes us healthy; unsound (unhealthy) doctrine makes us sick.

“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16).