

What Is Soundness?

Introduction. We've likely all referred to churches as "sound" and "unsound". People may say, "We don't read in the Bible of churches being sound or unsound". Is soundness a scriptural concept? Can we say what's sound and unsound?

I'll grant that labels are quick and easy and not always accurate, but some descriptive terms are scriptural and necessary. We're going to consider soundness, not as a label, but as a concept.

"Sound" means "not diseased or sickly, free from flaw or defect, free from error or fallacy, right, valid, or showing good judgment". The word can describe several concepts such as sound grammar, sound investing, sound technique, sound judgment, and sound reasoning.

Whatever it is, "sound" describes what's right, accurate, valid, and true. Whatever we're talking about, we generally want it to be sound, whether it's making an investment in a company, buying a car, or getting on an airplane. But in religion, suddenly the concept of soundness becomes ambiguous to people.

Paul presents several concepts of soundness in the New Testament, and investigating them will let us draw the necessary and correct conclusions of soundness as it relates to Christ's church.

I. Sound Mind

- A. In 2 Corinthians 5:13, Paul says that the apostles were "of sound mind". Some translations say a "right mind".
- B. This is talking about a sober or rational mind. The thinking process is straight and clear, on the level, and in subjection to God.

II. Sound Doctrine

- A. The term for "sound" in 1 Timothy 1:8-10 is the same word used regarding someone's health.
 - 1. To be sound in health is to be well, healthy, and whole.
 - 2. The word is also used in the Bible to indicate being free from corruption, and this a word Paul uses a lot in the letters to Timothy and Titus.
- B. To a lot of people, doctrine has simply become a choice; that is, you choose the doctrine you like. But you can't expect to be right before God that way because God wants us to follow sound doctrine.
 - 1. What doctrine is sound? It's doctrine that comes from an inspired source and promotes a godly life.
 - a) Something contaminated is not sound, like contaminated water.
 - b) We inherently know we don't want that and will strongly resist it.
 - 2. What about contaminated thinking — a person of unsound mind?
 - a) Maybe they have an altered mental status because of drinking, drug abuse, or severe mental illness.
 - b) In 2 Timothy 4:3-4, these people had truth, but now they want something different. They leave sound doctrine and turn aside to fables.

- C. One of the greatest appeals to people is when something is different — and different teaching is no different. But when you're different from truth, you're unsound and unhealthy.
 - 1. If you take a regular prescription, and you pick up a refill at the pharmacy and the pills now look different, does this concern you?
 - 2. In the same way, we need to pay careful attention to when doctrine is changed and is different from the scriptural norm (cp. Titus 1:9).
- D. It should be noted that when the Scriptures speak of sound doctrine, it's never spoken of casually.
 - 1. The subject of sound doctrine is treated with great importance and vigilance.
 - 2. Why? Because when doctrine becomes unsound, our faith, practice, and the church will become unsound. Therefore, we speak sound doctrine (Titus 2:1).

III. Sound Words

- A. The issue of soundness isn't just matter of doctrine; it's also a matter of motives and attitudes (1 Timothy 6:3-5).
- B. Attitudes that aren't according to godliness produce something different than God's will: Morbid interests, controversial questions, and disputes about words.
 - 1. This is someone who's not just saying untrue things. This person has speech that's looking to make trouble — it's not godly. This person doesn't have a sound attitude, sound behavior, or sound motives.
 - 2. Sometimes churches have unsound words, not just in terms of teaching, but in motives and purpose.
 - a) Some might be ugly and full of strife.
 - b) Some might not be full of God's purpose.
 - (1) This is often true of unsound churches.
 - (2) They're nice and friendly and full of love but their motives as a church are not what Scripture demands.
- C. And even when standing in sound doctrine, we can become contaminated in our motives, attitudes, habits, and behavior.
 - 1. Maybe the motive is only to be proven right.
 - 2. Maybe the motive is to be popular.
 - 3. Maybe the motive is financial gain.
- D. Love plays a big part in speaking sound words (2 Timothy 1:13).
 - 1. This isn't the world's version of love; it's not an emotional high or love of whatever feels good — those kinds of love will lead you into unsoundness.
 - 2. Biblical love wants to bring sinners to repentance and salvation. Therefore, biblical love reproves and works to turn people to righteousness. It examines, confronts, and exhorts in the love of Christ.

IV. Sound Faith

- A. The task of an elder is to sometimes rebuke people sharply (Titus 1:13). Why? This definitely goes against the cultural norm of what "church" is to people now: love, warmth, and acceptance.

- B. We rebuke so that people may go from unsoundness in the faith to soundness. And notice how he says to do it: sharply. There's several examples of rebuke in the Bible:
 1. Samuel rebuked Saul (1 Samuel 13:9-14).
 2. Nathan rebuked David (2 Samuel 12:1-12).
 3. John the Baptist rebuked Herod (Luke 3:18-20).
 4. Paul rebuked Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:8-11).
- C. The sense of urgency can be illustrated by riding in a car with someone who's driving on the wrong side of road.
 1. What do you do? You speak sharply.
 2. That doesn't mean there's a lack of love, but there's an urgency to making correction, to making them a "sound" driver.

V. Sound Speech

- A. Titus 2:6-8 ties together sound words, doctrine, and purpose.
 1. We show integrity (purity, sincerity, and honesty) in doctrine.
 2. We show reverence in doctrine.
 - a) We honor the authority behind sound doctrine.
 - b) We show humility and respect to sound doctrine.
 3. We show incorruptibility in doctrine.
 - a) We are steadfast — not changing with every wind, not swayed.
 - b) We are free of the desire of gain or respect of persons.
- B. In concluding instructions to the different age groups, Paul reminds Titus that his own conduct must confirm his teaching so that the opponents will be ashamed, having nothing evil to say about him.

VI. What About A Sound Church?

- A. Can we apply this same concept of soundness to a church?
 1. Since we can find the concept of soundness in Scripture, we can apply to anything: A congregation or an individual's faith, belief, behavior, etc.
 2. What constitutes a sound congregation? A congregation is sound or unsound depending on the doctrine it teaches, accepts, and practices. Breaking it down further, a sound church is ...
 - a) A church which follows and adheres to sound doctrine.
 - b) A church which is of sound mind and sound faith.
 - c) A church which is careful in its study and application of Scripture.
 - d) A church which treats the Word of God with reverence.
 - e) A church which hasn't corrupted the doctrine of the Bible.
 - f) A church which conducts itself with doctrinal integrity.
 3. When we look back to the New Testament, a sound church had several characteristics:
 - a) It was guided solely by the apostles' doctrine and not man-made creeds, disciplines, manuals, catechisms, confessions of faith, etc. (Acts 2:42; Philippians 1:27; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Galatians 1:6-9).
 - b) It worshiped on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). This worship was in spirit and in truth (John 4:24) and included singing a

capella (Ephesians 5:19), giving (1 Corinthians 16:1-2), observing the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26), praying (Acts 2:42), and studying God's Word (Acts 20:7).

- c) It was organized on a local, autonomous level with the church having elders, deacons, members, and evangelist(s) who preached and taught (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; 2 Timothy 4:5).
 - d) It was designated as "church" (Colossians 1:18), "church of Christ" (Romans 16:16), "church of the Lord" (Acts 20:28), "church of the firstborn" (Hebrews 12:23), and "church of God" (1 Corinthians 1:2).
 - e) It was entered as a result of people becoming saved after their belief, repentance, confession, and submission to baptism (Acts 2:36-47).
 - f) It was intended to be more than a building. Its mission is to lead people into a relationship with Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20). Your effectiveness is measured by more than the space you occupy in a pew. Instead of you being at church, you are the church.
- B. Furthermore, if we're going to be concerned with sound doctrine like Paul, then we must intentionally be concerned with a congregation's soundness.
- 1. We're right in making a judgment or assessment as to whether a congregation we will work and worship with, have association with, or commend or approve is sound or not.
 - 2. This means that we all need to be discerning, to consider whether a church is walking in sound doctrine and teaching sound doctrine.

Conclusion. Ezra "had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (7:10). We can have the heart of Ezra. As we've seen in the lesson, it hinges on having a heart for soundness. Let's "hold fast the pattern of sound words" (2 Timothy 1:13). May God bless us to have this heart and work to instill it in others.

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