

### **The Necessity Of Sound Doctrine**

*“But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto 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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” (2 Timothy 3:13–4:4)*

The text before us presents to us a picture of the aged apostle, nearing his death, and desiring to see his protégé Timothy hold fast to the truth he had taught him so that the church where Timothy was pastor would prosper. Paul knew that the way of true prosperity for the people of God would be through the teaching and receiving of sound doctrine. It is sound doctrine that Timothy is commanded to preach and teach.

What is this thing called sound doctrine? The word doctrine simply means teaching. It is in the Word of God that is the source of this sound doctrine that is to be to our benefit. Furthermore, sound doctrine is that which is clean, healthy, and pure, as the word sound comes from the Greek word *ὑγιαίνω*, from which we get our English word hygiene. The cleanliness and purity of doctrine are determined by its origin and content, both of which are to be Scriptural.

### **The Source And Authority Of Sound Doctrine**

*“Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” (John 7:16–17)*

God ordained Jesus’ doctrine. All that Jesus said and taught had its origin in His Father (*John 5:30-40;12:44-50*). As Jesus taught and performed various miracles, it was known that His teaching was with authority (*Luke 4:32*). The source of that authority was the very Word of God. Jesus’ doctrine was based upon Scripture. Though He is the Word of God (*John 1:1-4,14*), Jesus came to fulfill God’s Word (*Matthew 5:17-20*) and confirm its authority and validity (*Romans 15:4,8;2 Corinthians 1:20*). When questioned concerning the resurrection, Jesus’ reply was Biblical and the people were astonished at His doctrine (*Matthew 22:23-33*). The way that Jesus taught doctrine was to properly explain and apply God’s Word. If that was the way of Jesus, it should be our way as well.

As the apostles went forth preaching and teaching, their practice was to continue in the doctrine of Jesus Christ. *“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy*

*temple in the Lord: in whom you also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:19–22) The early church was built by their continuing in the doctrine of the apostles (Acts 2:41-47), which was nothing other than the doctrine that they learned from Christ and the doctrine that was about Christ and His work. This doctrine was Biblical through and through. One only need read the Acts and the writings of the apostles to find that they based their teachings solely upon the Scriptures.*

It is our duty to do the same as Christ and the apostles. Our text tells us that we are to find our doctrine within the inspired Scriptures, which are God’s Word. Our doctrines are given to us so that we may profit by them in learning, in seeing our sins, in correcting our errors and sins, and in becoming transformed into the people God would have us to be so that we might please Him. Thus it is that Paul told Timothy, *“Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” (1 Timothy 4:13–16)* He also told him that the pastor is to preach and apply the Word with doctrine (2 Timothy 4:1-5). In other words, the profit of the church is found in preaching that is doctrinal in nature. It is the duty of pastors to teach God’s Word as they preach (There is no Biblical distinction between preaching and teaching.), and to show the application of doctrine (reprove, rebuke, exhort) to the people. The source of sound doctrine is the Scriptures.

Jesus upheld the principle of doctrine being Biblically based when He said to the scribes and Pharisees, *“Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” (Matthew 15:7–9)* And when He was inquired of concerning marriage, Jesus pointed men back to the Scriptures (Matthew 19:1-6). His reply concerning the resurrection was founded upon Biblical authority (Matthew 22:23-33), and we must hold to the same today. Sound doctrine has Scripture as its authority and source.

### **The Content And Product Of Sound Doctrine**

*“Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; And hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, My speech shall distil as the dew, As the small rain upon the tender herb, And as the showers upon the grass: Because I will publish the name of the LORD: Ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: For all his ways are judgment: A God of truth and without iniquity, Just and right is he. They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: They are a perverse and crooked generation.” (Deuteronomy 32:1–5)*

Moses’ teaching shows us that doctrine must begin with God. Many people speak negatively about theology as though it were a bad thing. The reality is that theology is primarily the study of God. We all have a theology. Our theology is what we believe about God. Thus even atheists have a theology, even if it is an anti-theology.

If we are to have sound doctrine, it must be theological in content. We cannot worship God correctly without knowing who He is. Jesus said as much when speaking to the woman of Samaria: *“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”* (John 4:21–24) Jesus tells us that there are two things necessary to acceptable worship (We are to worship God in spirit rather than worry about locations such as temples, and we are to worship God in truth rather than in ignorance as the Samaritans did.), and the most important of those two things is to know God so that we can worship Him in spirit and in truth. Doctrine is absolutely necessary if we are to worship God acceptably. This is why Paul preached a doctrinal sermon to a group of lost people in Athens, they were worshiping a god they called “The Unknown God.” Paul corrected their theology by preaching a doctrinal message that called them to repent and trust Jesus Christ (*Acts 17:22-31*). Sound doctrine begins with teaching about God. No doubt this is one reason why our Bible begins with God in the very first verse.

Our obedience is based upon the doctrinal starting point of who God is also. *“Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else. Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever.”* (Deuteronomy 4:39–40) We can only obey God when we know Him as He reveals Himself in His Word. This is why Paul went into great detail regarding the deity of Christ, His sufferings, resurrection, and ascension back into Heaven in Philippians chapter two (*Philippians 2:1-11*): he knew that our obedience is only as good as our knowledge of the doctrine of Christ, and it was to obedience that he is calling us all (*Philippians 2:12-16*).

Faith in Christ and faithful obedience are the products of sound doctrine. This is why Paul commanded Timothy to hold fast the Word of God that he had been taught: *“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto 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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”* (2 Timothy 3:14–17) It is those who abandon sound doctrine who are rebuked of Christ (*Matthew 15:1-9*), and who go astray into destructive ungodliness (*1 Timothy 6:1-16*).

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Sometimes the attitude is present that seems to say, “Well, I guess doctrine is fine for the academics and the seminarians, and others who care for such stuff: we

only wish to worship God and see people saved.” What should our response to this be?

First of all we should realize that worship is not something that is done in ignorance of theology and doctrine. Worship is grounded in good doctrine. That is why Jesus told us that we must worship “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Before Paul could help the people of Athens, he needed to correct their theology, so he said, *“Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.”* (Acts 17:22–23) God’s complaint against Israel was not that they did not worship, but that they had too little knowledge of Him: *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: Seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”* (Hosea 4:6) Israel worshiped, but they worshiped incorrectly. In fact, their lack of doctrinal understanding led them to worship other gods rather than the one true God. The only way that we can worship correctly and acceptably is to have a doctrinal knowledge of God. *“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire.”* (Hebrews 12:28–29)

Salvation is also a doctrinal issue. Paul rejoiced that the Roman church had obeyed the doctrine that was delivered to them, that is, the gospel. *“God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”* (Romans 6:17) The leaders of Israel understood that the preaching of the gospel of Jesus was a doctrinal issue, because they said, *“Did not we straitly command you that you should not teach in this name? and behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.”* (Acts 5:28) Paul also instructed Timothy that sound doctrine harmonizes with the gospel (1 Timothy 1:10–11). It is for this reason also that Paul the apostle warned the Galatians as he did regarding their errors. Salvation is a doctrinal issue, so we ignore doctrinal teaching at the very peril of our souls and the souls of those who hear us.

This being so, sound doctrine also is demanded for the health and salvation of the church. *“Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”* (1 Timothy 4:13–16) Pastors and churches who are careless with doctrine could very well find themselves having been deceived and misled regarding the gospel. This is why Paul tells Timothy that taking heed to sound doctrine could save both him and the church. Matthew Henry spoke well on this passage saying, *“He presses it upon him to be very cautious: ‘Take heed to thyself and to the doctrine, consider what thou preachest; continue in them, in the truths that thou hast received; and this will be the way to save thyself, and those that hear thee.’* Observe, (1.) Ministers are engaged in saving work, which makes it a good work. (2.) The care of ministers should be in the first place to save themselves: *“Save thyself in the first*

place, so shalt thou be instrumental to save those that hear thee.” (3.) Ministers in preaching should aim at the salvation of those that hear them, next to the salvation of their own souls. (4.) The best way to answer both these ends is to take heed to ourselves, etc.<sup>1</sup> We need never expect our churches to be saved and healthy apart from the preaching and believing of sound doctrine, and the only life that stands the test of the judgment is that which is based upon sound doctrine (Matthew 7:21-29).

### **Sound Doctrine Versus False Doctrine**

Jesus Himself warns against false doctrine. He warned His disciples of the doctrine of the Pharisees (Matthew 16:5-12). He also stated that there would be false doctrine in the end times that would be very persuasive and deceitful. *“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.”* (Matthew 24:24) This is why many will reject Christ and go to hell, Paul tells us: *“And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”* (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12) It is very important that the church be zealous in order to know and believe true doctrine. False doctrine has the power to condemn people forever!

Sound doctrine has the power to stop ungodly people from continuing in their sin and false teaching. Paul told Titus that a pastor must be sound in doctrine, *“holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake.”* (Titus 1:9-11) The only way that we can convince people of the truth is to be able ourselves to speak the truth, prove our point, and live it out in such a manner as will be winsome and a blessing. The knowledge and preaching of sound doctrine has the power to convert to Christ those who are lost deceivers who mislead other people. The power of sound doctrine is the power of Christ! (See also Luke 4:14-32.)

Paul also taught Timothy that sound doctrine has much to do with our obedience to Christ. He told him (1 Timothy 1:3-11) that sound doctrine is in accord with the gospel, honors the law of God in its rightful application in our lives, and should lead us to love God and our fellow man. He also commanded Timothy to be sure that he applied himself to learning God’s Word, because false doctrine will lead us astray into more and more ungodliness: *“But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the*

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2356.

*resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”* (2 Timothy 2:16–19) Just as surely as the commandment is for those who call upon the Lord to depart from iniquity, when we embrace sound doctrine it will lead to holiness in our lives.

### **Contending For Sound Doctrine**

The early church was marked by their continuing in sound doctrine (Acts 2:42). The Word of God came to them numerous times commanding them to be firm in sound doctrine and to seek to be pure in doctrine. Paul told the Ephesians that pastors were given to teach the church so that the church would be strong in Christ. *“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:”* (Ephesians 4:11–15) Sound doctrine is to be contended for because it is necessary to our salvation, and is also necessary to our Christian growth. Today there are many whose spiritual growth is stunted because they are not being fed sound doctrine. We should contend for sound doctrine in the churches because it is necessary to the spiritual well being of God’s children.

The church at Ephesus was warned against false teachers (Acts 20:28-32), Peter warned of them as well (2 Peter 2:1-3), John did also (2 John 1:7-11), and Jude said, *“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (Jude 1:3–4) We must be on our guard against false teachers and false doctrine at all times.

We are also told that there are times that we must separate from people who hold to false doctrine. *“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”* (Romans 16:17–18) False teachers look and sound as if they are the real things. They have good words and speak well. What they say is appealing. They could not deceive people if their teaching were not appealing. Paul warned the Corinthians of such saying, *“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.”* (2 Corinthians 11:13–15) False teachers will often fit in

with good, godly people until their teaching demonstrates their error. Sometimes it is their lifestyle that will show their error before it shows up in their teaching. (This is why we should sincerely seek to be sure that those who are pastors in the churches are men who are qualified according to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.) Their nice manners and good sounding sermons or teaching will often lead people astray. This is why we must warn them of their divisive doctrines as soon as we become aware of them (Titus 3:10), and separate from them if they do not repent. Believing and teaching things that are contrary to the truth regarding the nature of God, the way of salvation, and the morality and holiness that are to be in the lives of God's people cannot be tolerated. We must separate from those who hold to false doctrine.

### **Final Thoughts**

We are living in the day of which God's Word warned us saying, *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."* (2 Timothy 4:3-5) It is indeed our duty to be watchful and to hold fast to the truth. There will be many who resist, yet we should hold fast to the truth, uphold the gospel of Christ, and be willing to suffer for the truth if need be. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15), and we should strive to grow stronger as we uphold sound doctrine in the church, in our lives, and in the world.

It is also necessary for us to realize our need to grow. We should never think that we have come to the point that we know all that there is to know of the doctrine of our Lord. Too many people sit smugly, thinking that they have the truth, that all those who disagree with them even on minor points are wrong and ungodly, and that they have no need to examine where they stand. We should ever be seeking to grow and examining our doctrine so that we can worship God acceptably and be a blessing to others. I was once told of a minister who is now deceased who studied the way of salvation more than any other doctrine. His reasoning was that if he were wrong on that, nothing else mattered. There is much truth in this. We should always be willing to examine where we stand in order to learn more than we presently learn, and that we might grow to better serve our Savior.

Finally, those of us who are pastors need to remember the words of Paul, who told Timothy, *"Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."* (2 Timothy 2:1-2) There is a great need for us to educate and train the next generation of preachers so that they will be equipped to carry on the work of preaching sound doctrine.

