

SOUND DOCTRINE



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Sound Doctrine

Sound Doctrine
T. M. Moore
Susie Moore, Editor and Finisher

Copyright, 2017 T. M. and Susie Moore
The Fellowship of Ailbe

Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Contents

Welcome to <i>Sound Doctrine</i>	4
1 Fuel for the Divine Economy	5
2 The Source of Sound Doctrine	7
3 Mind, Heart...	9
4 ...Conscience...	11
5 ...and Sincere Faith	13
6 Sound Doctrine, or Other?	15
7 For the Glory of the Gospel	17
Questions for Reflection of Discussion	19

Welcome to *Sound Doctrine*

The first reason God gave us the Scriptures is that we may understand the *doctrines* that equip us for *every good work*. *Doctrine* matters, and *sound* doctrine matters supremely.

In our day, many believers scorn the study of sound doctrine, regarding it as merely academic, nearly always divisive, or impractical and unrelated to issues of life and faith. But nothing could be further from the truth.

The doctrines of God's Word are designed to shape us increasingly into the image of Christ, so that, soul and life, we are empowered by the fuel of the divine economy for every good work. In this study, we'll consider the importance of sound doctrine, and how to approach the study of it, so that we may realize the joy and rejoicing of heart God intends for us.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Fuel for the Divine Economy

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. 1 Timothy 1.3, 4

Stay the course!

I have been arguing the point that, for the Word of God to fulfill its promise of being the joy and rejoicing of our heart, we must read and study it faithfully, following the best methods and practices for feeding on Scripture as our daily spiritual nourishment. One of the most delightful and edifying benefits of rightly dividing the Word of truth, consistently and increasingly, is that we come to know and learn to use the *teaching* of Scripture for growing in the Lord and His grace. Sound *doctrine* provides the solid food of the Word that helps us grow strong in our walk with and work for the Lord.

Paul's admonition to Timothy is typical of similar words to the other churches under his care: Be on guard against false teaching. Since the Scriptures have been given to the Church as the source of sound doctrine (2 Tim. 3.15-17), any teaching which veers from the doctrines of Scripture must be identified and resisted. Paul instructed Titus to train the elders to oppose false teaching, which was threatening to tear the churches apart (Tit. 1.5-11). He warned the Corinthians not to be pulled off course by the false teaching of self-proclaimed "super-apostles" (2 Cor. 12). He expressed astonishment that the Galatians had so quickly turned from sound doctrine to a false gospel of faith plus works (Gal. 1.6-9). And he charged the Thessalonians not to turn away from the doctrine he had taught them during his visit with them (2 Thess. 2.15).

As is clear from these and many other passages, doctrine matters; and *sound* doctrine matters supremely if we are to know joy and rejoicing in our time of feeding on the Word of God.

Sound doctrine today

In Paul's mind, teaching sound doctrine in the churches of the Lord is a serious matter. Anything that detracts from sound doctrine is to be resisted, silenced, and expunged from the Body of Christ. It is the duty of each pastor – and everyone who feeds on the Word of God – to keep a close watch on the doctrine which is taught in his congregation, lest deviations and divisions set in (1 Tim. 4.16).

We don't have to wonder what Paul would think about the minimizing of sound doctrine that has infected many churches in our day. Mention the word *doctrine* to many Christians, and even many pastors, and they will wrinkle their noses up as though they'd been exposed to a bad odor. In our day, *story* is the preferred medium of instruction; *doctrine* is downplayed as academic, divisive, out of step with the temper of the times, and not what people want to hear anyway.

This diminishing of sound doctrine opens the door for false teaching, which can rob us of the joy of our salvation and make us slaves to men.

The divine economy

Doctrine – the sound doctrine of the Word of God – is the fuel that drives the divine economy in all its dimensions. Sound doctrine is indispensable for the work of making disciples. Jesus said that we are to teach others all that He has taught us, and His curriculum, as we read it in the Gospels, is nothing other than sound doctrine (Matt. 28.18-20). We cannot accomplish the task of making disciples if we allow those we teach only to sip on the milk of Scripture, flavored with whatever stories and anecdotes will satisfy their too-easily-quenched thirst. Making disciples requires sound doctrine; without it, we're just filling our churches with babes in Christ.

Sound Doctrine

Sound doctrine is therefore also necessary for building the Church (Eph. 4.11-16). The local church does not grow simply because it's adding more babes to the roster. Many congregations of the Body of Christ today are little more than adult nurseries, and even though their ranks continue to swell, there's no real growth in unity or maturity taking place. Such growth requires real disciples who are ministering to one another and the world, and, as we have seen, you can't grow disciples apart from sound doctrine.

Sound doctrine is also essential for advancing the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Each of those defining ideas is fraught with doctrinal substance and significance. How can we seek this Kingdom unless we are steeped in the Biblical teaching concerning its defining attributes?

God is unfolding and advancing His Kingdom on earth, unto righteousness, peace, and *joy* in the Holy Spirit. That Kingdom proceeds by the power of God's Spirit on the fuel of sound doctrine. Neglect sound doctrine, and the progress of the divine economy stalls, and the joy we are promised in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ eludes us.

There's just no way around it. Sound doctrine is necessary for vital Christian life, church growth, and Kingdom advance. No Christian, and no church, can thrive without it.

For reflection

1. Why do you think many Christians have a bad taste in their mouth for *doctrine*?
2. Does it matter which doctrines we believe? Can you think of an example of *false* doctrine that could undermine faith and obedience?
3. What is your approach to understanding the using sound doctrine?

Next steps – Conversation: Talk with a few Christian friends about their understanding of doctrine. Do they regard sound doctrine as something to be taken seriously?

2 The Source of Sound Doctrine

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 complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3.16, 17

Systematic instruction

We've seen how urgent Paul was, with all his churches and pastors, that they hew to sound doctrine in their teaching and preaching. Sound doctrine is the fuel of the divine economy, and a key to knowing the joy and rejoicing that come from rightly dividing the Word of truth. We can only wonder what those believers and their pastors are thinking today who hold sound doctrine in low regard.

They may think they're teaching the Bible in the way God intends, but without a proper regard for sound doctrine, we can have no profit from the Word of God. All Scripture, inspired by God, is given to us, in the first instance, for *doctrine*. "Doctrine" simply means the systematic teaching of God's revelation in the Bible concerning all matters relevant to faith and life. Since the Scriptures are sufficient to equip us for "every good work," we must assume that all the doctrine we need to prepare for and execute those good works can be gleaned from the Scriptures.

In short, if our teaching of Scripture is not, in the first place, doctrinal – and grounded in *sound* doctrine – then it's difficult to see how it can be of any *profitable* or *practical* use in our everyday lives.

Ask questions

How do we ferret out the doctrines of Scripture that can help us in making disciples, building the Church, and advancing the Kingdom of Christ?

Deriving sound doctrine from the Word of God grows out of our daily discipline of feeding on the Scriptures, seeking Christ and His Kingdom, that we may increase in righteousness, peace, and joy in Him. Understanding sound doctrine involves a process of asking questions, searching the Scriptures, and putting our findings together in an orderly and consistent manner, making sure to check our conclusions against the best teaching of the Christian tradition.

Suppose, for example, we want to learn what the Bible teaches about, let's say, work – what it's for, how we should approach it, what ways we should conduct our work, and to what ends. Is work to be received as a gift and calling, or is it a drudgery to be endured for the time being? Is our work an arena for seeking the Kingdom, or does it exist apart from such spiritual interests?

Search the Scriptures

Whatever questions we have about work, we bring to the pages of Scripture, knowing that the Holy Spirit, Who is our primary Teacher, will guide us to passages in both the Old and New Testaments where the Lord speaks about work in one way or another (1 Cor. 2.12, 13). Using a concordance, Bible dictionary, and other resources – including those available from our Christian forebears – we discover as many as we can of the passages in Scripture that have something to say about work. Jot them down and determine to make a careful study of each.

Then, carefully examine each of these passages in its own context, using the approach to reading and study we have discussed in previous installments of this series. The goal is to make sure we understand what the writer is saying. For example, if we take Ecclesiastes 2.22, 23 simply at face value, without an understanding of the context in which this passage occurs, we're likely to get a wrong idea about Solomon's view of work. Here he writes, "For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? For all his days *are* sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no

rest. This also is vanity.” Sounds like work is a drudgery, a necessary evil.

But, in the context, Solomon is commenting on work undertaken as *an end in itself*, a means to *self-fulfillment* or *material success*, apart from any notion of serving God with our work. In such a case work can be meaningless, but we need the larger context to help us understand. In the context of the entire book of Ecclesiastes, where we learn the importance of living *under the heavens* and not merely *under the sun*, work takes on a much more important purpose.

Order your findings

Continuing in our example, after you’ve studied each passage relating to work, you’ll want to put them together in a logical arrangement. You’ll want to order your study of various passages, to combine their individual meanings into a larger whole.

Imagine yourself in a conversation with the Bible, and you’re asking questions in the order that would make sense to you. That will probably provide a good outline for how to arrange the various texts you’ve studied for constructing a larger, coherent explanation of the teaching of Scripture on your subject. Relate the passages to one another so that the thought of Scripture unfolds easily and logically, and you’ll begin to see the pattern of God’s thinking about the topic of work emerge before your very eyes.

Check your conclusions

Next, consult other sources to check your conclusions. Look to see what other Christians have written about a Biblical view of work, and correct or illuminate your teaching with what you find among the writings of the great teachers of the Church.

Finally, pray and reflect further to find personal applications for yourself, and general applications for the times in which we live.

As you approach Scripture in this way, on a wide range of topics and questions, you will be using the practices of rightly dividing the Word of truth for deriving sound doctrine from the Word of God. And this will not only further equip you for a life of good works, but will cause your joy and rejoicing to increase.

For reflection

1. How much of this kind of study – studying for sound doctrine – is part of your discipline of the Word of God?
2. What are some questions you might like to ask of Scripture?
3. How can you incorporate more study of sound doctrine into your walk with and work for the Lord?

Next steps – Preparation: Choose a question you would like to pursue as a topic of study. Begin approaching this question as outlined in this article. Take your time, keep notes, and make your study a matter of earnest prayer.

3 Mind, Heart...

Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart... 1 Timothy 1.5

Knowing and loving

I'm sure that one reason why there is so much antipathy to sound doctrine in the contemporary Church is that people have misunderstood doctrine's purpose and proper use.

Those who advocate for sound doctrine sometimes give the impression that *knowing* doctrine and *believing* it are the proper ends of doctrine. The more doctrine you *know*, and the more convincing you can be in *explaining* it, the stronger must be your faith.

In this case, doctrine becomes a kind of spiritual trump card: If I know the right doctrine and hold firmly to it, then I enjoy a kind of spiritual superiority over those with whom I might be engaged in discussion or debate. Doctrine is for knowing and believing; the more you know and the more firmly you believe it, the more your faith will be what it ought to be.

But simply *knowing* doctrine is never enough. The devil knows the doctrines of Scripture as well as the best theologians in the Church, but they don't do him any good.

Paul says the aim of teaching sound doctrine is love. In fact, he would say that we don't really *know* doctrine – no matter how well versed in it we may be – until it issues in love for God and love for others in the way we live. “The purpose of the commandment is love,” Paul wrote, and the commandment he had in mind was sound doctrine (cf. vv. 3, 10, 11). When doctrine is having its proper effect on us, love is the result. And getting to love involves more than just what we *know* – or, think we know. Love is a matter of mind *and* heart.

The role of the heart

Knowing doctrine is important, of course. The more we study the Scriptures, asking questions about this, that, and the other, searching and studying the Scriptures, organizing our thoughts, and comparing our conclusions with the best teachers in the Christian tradition, the more we will be able to build up our store of doctrinal knowledge concerning all the Bible teaches. Every believer in Christ should be working hard to improve his stock of knowledge about the sound doctrines of the faith.

But if love is going to ensue from our study of sound doctrine, two other aspects of the soul must be engaged, and not only engaged, dramatically transformed. The first of these is the heart.

Paul writes that the aim of sound doctrine is love, that issues “from a pure heart...” (v. 5). Now the heart is the seat of affections – our attitudes, feelings, hopes, and aspirations. We all have such affections – love, hate, fear, disgust, anger, longing, compassion, zeal, and so forth. Studies in the field of neuroscience are beginning to confirm what Scripture has taught all along, that the emotions are an important component in a life of wisdom. We need to make sure our affections are *pure*, and this means that they must be focused on the right objects, and developed to the proper degree of intensity.

Two sorts of affections

Affections are of two sorts: those that *incline* us toward something – such as compassion, love, joy, hope, and desire – and those that *repel* us from something – disgust, anger, hatred, and so forth. All these affections matter and have their place in our lives, but they must be properly *focused* and developed to the *right intensity* if they are to do the work of bringing sound doctrine to expression in love.

Sound Doctrine

For example, we need to make sure that we love God, but hate sin; have compassion for the lost, but avoid those who are in rebellion against God; rejoice in the blessings of others and weep with their sorrows. The sound doctrines we are learning will help us to identify and focus on proper affections. From there we can work to make sure our affections are developed to the proper level of intensity – loving God with *all* our heart, soul, mind, and strength, for example, and not just a little.

Engaging right affections with what we are coming to know about sound doctrine is an important step in making sure the doctrine we learn and profess will be put to use in loving God and our neighbors.

So while it's important to get the right knowledge about sound doctrine, we also have to wrap our hearts around the teaching of Scripture as well. Because sound doctrine won't issue in genuine love until it captures our imaginations *and* engages our hearts in ways consistent with the teaching of Scripture and the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For reflection

1. What is the difference between the role of the heart and the role of the mind in the life of faith?
2. Why can we not be satisfied with a merely *intellectual* grasp of sound doctrine?
3. Would affections and the role of the heart be a proper subject for doctrinal study? Explain.

Next steps – Preparation: In what ways are your affections currently involved in your reading and study of God's Word? Can you think of any ways of engaging your heart more completely?

4 ...Conscience...

Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience... 1 Timothy 1.5

The seat of the will

Discerning, understanding, and using sound doctrine, so that we profit from all that God's Word teaches about the many topics that interest us, is a matter of right understanding and proper affections. We must come to *know* the truth as Scripture teaches it; and we must have the *right affections* engaged with that truth. We're really beginning to make the best use of sound doctrine when we understand it with our minds and have engaged it in our hearts, so that we *feel* and *desire* what we are coming to *know* of sound doctrine.

But, as Paul indicates in our text, getting love to flow from sound doctrine also involves the *conscience*. Mind, heart, and conscience – these three components of the soul: All must be shaped and brought into the effort of learning and living according to sound doctrine.

What is the conscience? In the soul, the conscience is that immaterial aspect that develops and stores our values, priorities, and default choices. Another way of thinking of the conscience is as the will. In the soul, a continuous dialog is underway between the mind – what we think – the heart – how we feel – and the conscience – our most basic convictions. The conscience functions as a kind of referee in the soul, bringing together the thoughts of our minds and the affections of our hearts in a harmonious and truthful way, so that love can issue from all our learning. Thus, it is very important that the conscience be in proper working order – what Paul describes as a “good” conscience, one that pleases God and serves men (Acts 24.16).

Sound doctrine – such as the doctrine of work – won't do us much good if we only *know* the doctrine, or *take joy* in such knowledge. Unless we *value* what we know and massage it into the determinations of our *will*, it is not likely to issue in love for God and neighbors in our lives.

A good conscience

As we study the great doctrines of Scripture and the Christian faith, we may find our mind wondrously agitated and refreshed in thinking the thoughts of God after Him. Our study of sound doctrine may lead us to feel very excited, even exhilarated about what we're coming to understand. But unless we *will* these thoughts and affections into action, they will remain just that – mere subjective experiences without benefit to men or glory to God.

The conscience is that component of the soul that forges thoughts and affections into strategies and decisions for action. Our conscience is in *good* shape when the actions flowing from our sound doctrine seek the wellbeing and edification of our neighbors and bring honor and glory to God. Sound doctrine that does not lead to a good conscience cannot issue in love, but will be only so many clanging cymbals of spiritual pride.

Toward a good conscience

So how do we get a good conscience?

The place to begin is with the Law of God, as Paul indicates in the larger context of our passage (1 Tim. 1.3-11). The Law of God was given to exercise a check on sinful inclinations, which are natural and persistent in every one of us. This is what Paul refers to as the law of sin (Rom. 7.21). The Law, being holy and righteous and good, illuminates any dark places in our soul, and fills any gaps in our will when it comes to living in obedience to the Lord. The Spirit of God will teach us the Law as we invest time reading and meditating in it (Rom. 7.12; Ezek. 36.26, 27; Ps. 1; Ps. 11.9-11). He convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment so that, in His power, and in the light of the Law, we can purify and reinforce our values and priorities, and bring our conscience into proper order before the Lord.

Sound Doctrine

Once the conscience has been engaged to integrate our thoughts and affections, we will need to act on whatever we are learning to be the right priority or choice for our will (Jms. 1.22-25). The more we act on the values, priorities, and convictions we are learning, the more these become imprinted in our conscience and established as working components of our will. As our conscience grows stronger in the Lord, and in His good and perfect will, it will exercise a powerful hold on our thinking and feeling, so that we grow stronger in our soul and more inclined to let sound doctrine have its proper outlet through works of love.

Work at it!

But we'll have to work at this. Sound doctrine is not just a matter of knowing truth in our mind – and not even of *feeling* really good, confident, or magnanimous as a result. Sound doctrine comes to expression in works of love, and for that to happen, we'll have to keep working hard at maintaining a good conscience to go with our true thoughts and pure affections.

Christ can purify our conscience from dead works and wrong values (Heb. 9.14), but we must exercise continuous vigilance, lest by neglect, our conscience become seared to sound doctrine, and our faith become shipwrecked (1 Tim. 1.19).

For reflection

1. What is the conscience, and how does it work in your soul?
2. How can you tell when your conscience is good?
3. What suggestions would you give a new believer to help him nurture and maintain a good conscience?

Next steps – Transformation: Meditate on Psalm 1. How can you begin to bring more of this “day and night” focus on God’s Law for strengthening your conscience?

5 ...and Sincere Faith

Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith... 1 Timothy 1.5

Faith without hypocrisy

One of the raps against Christians these days is that we're all talk, a lot of which we use to condemn those who disagree with us, but not much in the way of a lived reality. We know what we believe, hold to our faith passionately, and are firm in our convictions. We just can't seem to get the love to flow, and thus we appear to be hypocrites to many.

Which leads many believers to shun doctrine for a more "authentic" experience of following Jesus. Those in the contemporary Church who look askance at sound doctrine – preferring instead some combination of exuberant experience issuing from spiritual pep talks – may be after the very thing sound doctrine is able to produce.

Doctrine gets shunted aside because people perceive it as merely intellectual and even a little snobbish. They sense that following Jesus is more than words, and they want a more practical and loving faith than they often see in those who insist that they have the right doctrine on every matter.

What many believers are seeking is a *sincere* faith, an approach to following Jesus that is without hypocrisy, and that demonstrates love for God and neighbor with a spontaneity that doesn't have to be conjured or scripted. According to Paul, sound doctrine – right thinking combined with a pure heart and a good conscience – is the way to achieve such a laudable faith.

Aspects of sincere faith

The word, "sincere," in our text literally means, "without hypocrisy." This is the life of faith to which every Christian should aspire. It describes a true and constant walk with Jesus, a relationship of prayer, meditation, worship, and obedience which proves love for Him at every level, and in every situation.

A sincere faith also reaches out to others with a pure and disinterested desire to bless and serve. A sincere faith doesn't condemn others; doesn't consign them to irrelevance; and practices the kind of patience and forbearance that Jesus showed with His disciples at every turn.

A sincere faith enjoys talking about the Lord, and always has something new and interesting to contribute to the conversation. A sincere faith gives generously of time, treasure, and talents to the work of making disciples, building the Church, and advancing the Kingdom of Christ. Those who have a sincere faith love the world, as God Himself does (Jn. 3.16), and long earnestly for it to know the saving and restoring touch of the grace and truth of God.

Sound doctrine comes to mature expression when it assumes the form of a sincere faith, faith working by love.

In short supply – alas!

Now this kind of faith – without hypocrisy – seems to be in short supply in many churches today. Do you suppose there might be a correlation between our scorn of doctrine and our inability to demonstrate sincere and unhypocritical faith? Is it possible that the Church is failing in its lived witness because it has abandoned the very thing that engenders sincere faith?

I think it's not only possible, but quite likely. The followers of Christ are not going to grow and mature into

Sound Doctrine

sincere faith apart from daily and faithful feeding on the sound doctrine of Scripture. The sooner we acknowledge this, the sooner we'll be able to get back on course with our calling in this world.

The kind of instruction that leads to sincere faith begins with sound doctrine and engages a pure heart and a clean conscience as it works through the practical, lived implications of the teaching of God's Word. Such instruction – and such reading and study of God's Word – works through to implications, applications, and ramifications for everyday living, so that instruction leads to transformation as the Spirit forms Christ in us (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

If we swerve from such teaching, Paul warns (vv. 6-11), we will be vulnerable to smooth-talking know-nothings whose vain and vapid proclamations produce more in the way of covenant disobedience than sincere faith. Lives that do not glorify God in praise, worship, thanksgiving, obedience, and service to others are contrary to sound doctrine, and contrary to our callings as the followers of Christ (Jn. 15.1-11; 20.21).

But then, what should we expect when sound doctrine, the food and fuel of sincere faith, is minimized, ignored, or scorned?

If you're not being feeding on sound doctrine in your daily time with the Lord, as well as in your church, you will not gain the equipping you need for sincere faith that, as it touches the lives of others with the love of Jesus, builds the Church, advances the Kingdom, and glorifies God. Such sincere faith, characterized by loving God and our neighbors, can only come about as we pursue the study of Scripture and sound doctrine.

For reflection

1. What is hypocrisy? How can you recognize when hypocrisy might be taking root in your life?
2. How do your mind, heart, and conscience work together to help you live sincere and without hypocrisy as a follower of Christ?
3. Can we expect to know joy and rejoicing in the Lord if we live anything other than sincere faith? Explain.

Next steps – Conversation: Talk with some Christian friends about hypocrisy and how it robs us of sincere faith. How can you encourage one another to avoid hypocrisy?

6 Sound Doctrine, or Other?

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine...
1 Timothy 1.3

How can we know?

We might like to ask Paul, “no *other* doctrine? What do you mean by that?” How can we know whether what we’re learning from Scripture is *sound* doctrine? When what we’re hearing in teaching and preaching, and what we’re sharing with others, is what it ought to be, what Paul would approve?

Since sound doctrine is so important to the progress of the divine economy – making disciples, building the church, and advancing the Kingdom – and since communicating sound doctrine properly entails not only right content but speaking to the heart and conscience as well, so that love for God and neighbor are the outcome, it behooves us to understand just what Paul means here, lest, in our own teaching we begin to stray from the Pauline standard. And especially since all believers are called to teach the things of the Lord (Matt. 28.18-20), how can we know when *what* we’re teaching is sound doctrine?

Paul provides guidance for us in this matter of teaching sound doctrine, how we may ensure that our teaching and preaching are what they ought to be.

All God’s Word

Three passages from Paul can guide us in this matter. First is Acts 20.26, 27, in which Paul said to the elders of the churches in Ephesus, “Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.” Here is our first way of ensuring that our teaching and preaching are according to sound doctrine: Teach them *everything* the Scriptures teach!

The challenge to the teacher or preacher, and to all of us as disciple-makers, is to make sure we are asking the right questions of Scripture, questions designed to draw out answers for every aspect of human life and interest, all the doctrines of the faith and how they apply to the people entrusted to our instruction, from all the counsel of God in all His Word. We cannot do this apart from daily reading and meditation in the Word of God, and using the practices for deriving sound doctrine from our study.

Then we need to teach broadly, diligently, and consistently, working to live and explain a Christian worldview for the people to whom God sends us each day.

Don’t go beyond!

The second text is 1 Corinthians 4.6: “Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written....” Here Paul insists that those who teach and those who learn should keep within the bounds of sound doctrine as spelled out in the written Word of God.

Here again, we cannot hope to achieve such a standard without daily reading and meditation in the Word of God.

Both Moses and the apostle John also offered warnings about adding to the Scriptures in our teaching and learning. Pastors, teachers, and all believers must continuously submit their teaching to the whole counsel of God, waiting on and listening to the Holy Spirit as He compares Scripture with Scripture to make sound doctrine clear.

Sound Doctrine

The grand tradition

Finally, in 2 Thessalonians 2.15, Paul writes, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.” Here Paul indicates that, alongside the written Word, there exists a reliable tradition of apostolic teaching which helps to define the boundaries of sound doctrine.

Since Paul’s day, these *traditions* are reflected in the Magisterium of the Spirit, the best and most orthodox teaching from all ages of the Church. While this is not authoritative in the same way Scripture is – indeed, the theological tradition of the Church must always be subject to revision according to the Word of God – still, the teachers and theologians of Church history, together with the creeds and confessions of the Church, provide sure guidelines within which we must always seek to locate our own teaching and preaching.

Follow the guidelines

There is no substitute for sound doctrine when it comes to the work of making disciples, building the Church, and advancing the Kingdom of God. To make sure that sound doctrine informs and guides all aspects of our walk with and work for the Lord, we must devote ourselves to learning and teaching all that the Scriptures teach, Genesis to Revelation; to staying within the bounds of Scripture and not following the alluring voices of the age in any matter; and to checking all instruction by the grand tradition of theology and teaching in the Church.

Where sound doctrine is concerned, all Christians are called to be students, exemplars, and guardians. We will not be able to recognize, resist, and refute “other” and false doctrines apart from being well-grounding in all the counsel of God, concerning everything God intends us to know in serving Him and living joyously before Him.

For reflection

1. What would be some examples of “other” doctrines that some are teaching in Jesus’ Name these days?
2. To what extent does “the whole counsel of God” describe your approach to Scripture? How can you improve in this?
3. What might you do to become better informed about the great traditions of Christian orthodoxy?

Next steps – Transformation: We always do better in things when we’re accountable. Do you have a study partner or prayer partner, to whom you are accountable for your reading and study of Scripture? If not, find one. If so, meet with your partner and share what you have been learning through this series on sound doctrine.

7 For the Glory of the Gospel

... according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust. 1 Timothy 1.11

Two ends

Learning and teaching sound doctrine has two ends a *proximate* or near-term end, and an *ultimate* or overarching end.

The *proximate* end is that those who learn sound doctrine should grow in love for God and their neighbors. Sound doctrine is the fuel that moves the engine of love and drives the divine economy. If we do not teach sound doctrine, then we will most likely promote a view of Christian faith that is oriented to the self and its interests and needs: Get God to get you whatever you want, and let your neighbors fend for themselves.

That's a crude caricature, I know, but it's not far from the mark. If love for God and neighbor are not the driving force and consistent outcome of our learning and teaching, that leaves just one person to look out for: Me. Sound doctrine does not promote a self-serving gospel, but the only and true Gospel of our self-denying, God-exalting Savior and King.

And that is the *ultimate* end of sound doctrine – to further the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.

Compromised?

In the Church today, many are living a compromised gospel. Their understanding of the faith of Jesus is that it amounts to our sins being forgiven and being assured that we're going to heaven when we die. In between there's some stuff about loving others, expecting God to meet your needs, and being part of a church; but the real deal, the ultimate matter of this gospel is the assurance of heaven.

I would describe this, not as *true* Christianity in anything like its full and glorious sense, but a kind of *near* Christianity that almost, but not exactly, gets it right. Going to heaven when we die is certainly part of the Gospel message and way of life. But it's not the whole of it, because it fails to address the believer's calling to the Kingdom *and glory* of God (1 Thess. 2.12).

The *true* Gospel is glorious because it strives to glorify God in all things.

The glory of the Gospel

The Gospel is glorious because it brings the salvation of Jesus Christ into every area of our lives, so that all the various facets of our lives – all our relationships, roles, responsibilities, time, possessions, and diversions – are brought into the light of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, reconciled to God in Him, and set on a course of restoration to beauty, goodness, and truth.

We have embraced the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom, and all the glorious doctrines of that heavenly realm are shaping our lives, when we live for the glory of God in all of life, every day of our lives.

All who have believed the Gospel long for this transformation to proceed in their lives, and so they feed on sound doctrine to that end. By so doing, they grow in love for God and neighbor as they learn how to seek the glory of God and to let that glory come to expression in every aspect of their lives.

Proclaiming the Good News

But besides *living* that glorious Gospel, letting the glory of God shine through all their works and words, those who are fed and nurtured on the sound doctrine of the Word of God are also moved to *proclaim* that Gospel to the people in their everyday lives. What they are learning of sound doctrine to enrich and enhance the joy

Sound Doctrine

and rejoicing they have in the Lord, they eagerly and readily share with the people around them, whether those people are believers or unbelievers.

The Gospel is Good News, the very best news that anyone can know; thus, we do not keep it to ourselves. The Spirit of God within us provides the power to take sound doctrine and enable us to bear witness to Christ with the people around us (Acts 1.8). And, when we're loving God and our neighbors by learning sound doctrine, proclaiming the Gospel will have a prominent part in all our Christian experience.

Do not neglect sound doctrine!

So do not neglect to study sound doctrine as part of your daily reading and meditation in the Word of God. What the Church needs today – what you and I need – is sound doctrine, the Word of God learned and taught in all its facets, cover to cover, for every area of human life and interest.

We need to have our mind filled with sound doctrine, our heart engaged with it enthusiastically, our conscience bound by it, and our daily life shaped by it.

Sound doctrine is the need of the hour. Insist on it, and feed on it richly, rejoicing to feed on the whole counsel of God's Word, until the fruit of love and the progress of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God are more consistently evident in your everyday life.

For reflection

1. What is the glory of God? What does it mean to glorify God in our lives?
2. How can we aim at the *proximate* and *ultimate* goals of sound doctrine in all we do?
3. How can Christians encourage one another in sound doctrine?

Next steps – Conversation: Share with a Christian friend what you have learned about the importance of sound doctrine from this series. Make your friend a copy of the PDF of this series, and invite your friend to work through this study with you.

Sound Doctrine

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What do we mean by *sound doctrine*? What makes doctrine sound rather than “other”?
2. Outline the process for studying Scripture to learn sound doctrine. How much of this process are you practicing?
3. How do the mind, heart, and conscience come into play in learning sound doctrine?
4. How can we know when we are learning the sound doctrine we may be studying at any time?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve gained from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.