

NEEDS AND IMPORTANCE OF SOUND DOCTRINE
IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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Introduction:

Sound teaching leads to sound living. But all sound living does not necessarily stem from sound doctrine. The goal of every Christian is not just a good character, to live a good life and make the society and the world a better place. Our main goal is that through our doctrine and teaching we ourselves and the people whom we teach become a child of God and our spirit might inherit the kingdom of God eternally. So, our goal is to prepare our people to be able to enter the Spiritual Land. Francis Schaeffer once said, "If we do not make clear by word and practice our position for truth and against false doctrine we are building a wall between the next generation and the gospel".

In this world we have many religions and faiths in which different people put their trust. We also have many spiritual leaders who claimed to have had experienced spiritual enlightenment. Even among the Christians we have different denominations calling each other as a 'Cult' or 'Heresy'. What we can learn from this is that there are many counterfeit religions and denominations. These were not the work of God but rather the work of Satan. Satan knows very well that human beings are in need of spiritual help looking for a religion or doctrine to be followed. So he has created a number of counterfeits. "From the time of the Garden of Eden, Satan has known that mankind was created with the desire to worship, and many have accepted his counterfeit forms. Cain fell for Satan's trap. He made an offering according to his own creation and then killed his brother, Abel. The men who crucified Jesus were extremely religious. The Bible tells us that even those who receive the mark of the beast in the last days will be worshipping. Satan is not against religion. That's why he even invited Jesus to worship him, but he is furiously opposed to the truth of Christ's religion which exposes his devices and the people who do God's will".¹

The very first message of Paul to Timothy was, "*Command Men not to teach False Doctrines*" (1 Tim. 1:3).²

His closing prediction in his second epistle, "*The time will come when men will not put up with Sound Doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths*" (2 Tim. 3,4).

¹ http://vip.hyperusa.com/~davislt/how_to_choose_a_church.htm (Accessed August 9, 2013)

² All Bible texts are from the New King James Version unless stated otherwise

We should not be surprised at the outburst of different denominations among the Christians. Rather we should expect more to come. But as a faithful Christian our duty is to expose these false teachers and encourage the faithful believers to continue in the only True doctrine – the Apostolic Doctrine.

“There were four secrets for the bursting growth of the early church. Of these the first one was its steadfast continuance in the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42). To say, “Never mind doctrine, let’s go on with evangelism” is as ridiculous as a football team saying, “Never mind the ball, let’s get on with the game!”³

I. What Sound Doctrine Is:

a. Sound doctrine is the Gospel

Sound Doctrine is a teaching which is healthy enough to guide people to live their lives so when the Lord returns they might be found worthy to inherit His prepared place. It is to be found from sound teaching of the gospel of salvation. The main foundation of sound doctrine is only through Jesus. All good teachings are not necessarily sound doctrine. “Sound” means ‘healthy’, ‘wholesome’ and “Doctrine” means ‘teaching’. So, Sound doctrine is teaching that is healthy or wholesome for the hearers. All religions may have their good teachings, but we know that all religions do not lead to salvation. Sound doctrine is only to be found in the teaching of the Gospel. The Gospel is called “**the glorious Gospel**” (1Ti 1:11), “**Wholesome words**” (1Ti 6:3) “**good doctrine**” (1Ti 4:16).

b. Sound doctrine is a fact

The word doctrine means simply religious beliefs held and taught. It is the sacred task of all Christians, first as believers and then as teachers of religious beliefs, to be certain that these beliefs correspond exactly to truth. A precise agreement between belief and fact constitutes soundness in doctrine. We cannot afford to have less.⁴

c. Sound doctrine is Biblical

Doctrine can be man-made and not grounded on the teachings of the Bible. Some doctrines may have their principles from the Bible but may be twisted to suit the teachings of their denominations. So what we need is a doctrine that comes directly from God which is found in the Bible, taught and practiced as it is intended. That is Sound Doctrine.

d. Sound doctrine is Apostolic

The early Christians were careful not to deviate from the truth. They warn the churches strongly to contend for the faith. The writings of Paul and John are full of such warnings and condemnation of those teachers who harassed the young church by denying the incarnation and throwing doubts upon the doctrine of the Oneness of God. This we called the ‘Apostolic doctrine’

³R. Stanley, *Higher ways higher thoughts*, 2nd ed. May 1994 (Vellore, India: Blessing Youth Mission), 80

⁴A.W.Tozer, *Man the swelling place of God*, (Calcutta: Evangelical Literature depot, 1966), 161

Our generation is not free from such teachings and practices. Our Lord Jesus and the apostles had already predicted that the false teachers will creep into the Church. While truth is unchanging, the human heart is heretical by nature and runs to error frequently. Every now and then some evangelists and preachers will try to come up with a new theology and try to win people through their new found theology. As a result we have now many **Camping Theologies**⁵. This is also the result of lack of proper doctrinal teaching in the Church. If the right doctrine is correctly taught in the church people would not find it necessary to attend to such camps.

e. Sound doctrine is that which unites

Every minister from every denomination works sincerely and faithfully as though we are labourers in the vineyard of God. It is true that we should serve our God with all our abilities, but in our service for Him it is possible to neglect the important matters. Erwin Lutzer has written a book of “The Doctrines that Divide”. Here he pointed out several issues on which the Christian churches are divided. This book was written to examine the doctrines that divide the churches. But the author himself is biased on certain issues where he puts his remarks e.g. ‘Repentance, but not baptism, is necessary for the forgiveness of sins’⁶ I have no intention to argue on any point which Lutzer had written in his book but what I would like to say rather is ‘Doctrines Unites’. Sound Doctrine is that which unites its followers into oneness and its followers with God. If we all put away our own differences and rely on the pure teachings of the Gospel, unity between us and our God will automatically come. In the areas where the churches split on doctrinal issues it must be always understood that one must be wrong. It could also be that both are wrong if their teachings are not accurate with the Bible. To err even so slightly is to invite serious loss, even death itself. When Jesus prayed that His followers should be united in oneness, unity in their doctrine and practice was meant.

Montaigne said that a liar is one who is brave toward God and a coward toward men; for a liar faces God and shrinks from men. Is this not simply a proof of unbelief? Is it not to say that the liar believes in men but is not convinced of the existence of God, and is willing to risk the displeasure of a God who may not exist rather than that of man who obviously does?⁷

f. Sound doctrine is found in the true church

In our choice of a church, we must consider the doctrine of that particular church. Many people will choose a church because it's the church of their parents. Some will choose because it's close to their home. Still some may choose because of the building architecture is impressive. Very few people will think about the doctrine of their church which is most important.

In a church where the true doctrine is not taught, the members cannot experience the true salvation or grow in the knowledge of God's word. When the Holy Scriptures are not properly followed something outside of the Scripture is taken in to take its place. They may not quite give up the Bible, neither will they quite believe it; the result is an unclear body of beliefs more like a fog than a mountain, where anything may be true but nothing may be trusted as being certainly true.

⁵Interview with Pastor K. Lalthazuala, Lecturer, CBC Shillong, 23 August 2013

⁶Erwin Lutzer, *The Doctrines that Divide*, (Secunderabad: OM Books 1998), 135

⁷Tozer, p.163

II. GOD is the only source of Sound Doctrine

Churches and denominations are in the habit of laying down Principles and guidelines of doctrines for the church to follow. But as we see from the following references doctrines are not to be created by men but should come directly from the Lord as found in the Holy Scriptures. And a doctrine that does not stem out from the true gospel is false, though it may have biblical basis. The Holy Spirit also will not guide an individual or church against the Gospel and the Bible principles.

In Galatians 1:11-12 we read, “But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ”.

And again in the Second Peter 1:20-21 “Knowing this first that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”.

So the only source of Sound Doctrine is God and there is no room for human philosophy or interpretation. “Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help.” Psalm 146:3.

God is the sole source of our salvation “Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.” Isaiah 45:22

III. The Specifics of Sound Doctrine:

a. Sound doctrine teaches the full Gospel

Churches, denomination and religions may develop diverse forms of doctrines and creeds and every one of them may sound good, but the sound doctrine that we are in need today is not all those glittering laws but rather the Full Gospel of salvation – not some part of the gospel, the full gospel.

First Timothy 1:3 “As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine”, “**teach no other doctrine**” Doctrines other than the Gospel taught by the apostles could be categorised as other doctrine.

b. Sound doctrine teaches faith in Jesus Christ

Galatians 1:6-7 “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ”. Being drawn away from Jesus is being drawn away from sound doctrine. To have faith in Jesus is not only putting our faith on the works of Christ for our salvation, also to believe Him as He is. There are degrees of different degrees of faith in Jesus Christ – as a historical figure some believe Him just as a man, where as some believe Him as a prophet. Still some believe Him as one of the many gods or one of the triune God(s). But there are people who believe Him to be the only true God, the Creator of heaven and earth and there is no other gods beside Him. This belief on Jesus is sound doctrine.

c. Sound doctrine teaches the name of Jesus

Acts 4:18-20 “*And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*”. Sound doctrine teaches the name of Jesus. They speak, teach and do things in the name of Jesus.

Acts 5:27-29 “And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straightly command you that ye 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. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men”.

In these days we have many Christian denominations and churches that object to this sound doctrine. Teaching the name of Jesus, preaching the name of Jesus, baptizing in the name of Jesus, healing in the name of Jesus, casting out demons in the name of Jesus, etc. But the Scripture says, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him”. Col 3:17

So our responsibility to sound doctrine is mentioned in First Timothy 4:16 “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”.

IV. Why is Sound Doctrine so Important⁸

The importance of Sound Doctrine cannot be overemphasized in the life of a Christian. Right thinking about all spiritual matters is imperative if we would have right living. As men do not gather grapes of thorns nor figs of thistles, sound character does not grow out of unsound teaching.

1. Sound doctrine is important because *our faith is based on a specific message*. The overall teaching of the church contains many elements, but the primary message is explicitly defined: “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). This is the unambiguous good news, and it is “of first importance.” Change that message and the basis of faith shifts from Jesus Christ to something else. Our eternal destiny depends upon hearing “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (Ephesians 1:3; see also 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).
2. Sound doctrine is important because *the gospel is a sacred trust*, and we dare not tamper with God’s communication to the world. Our duty is to deliver the message, not to change it. Jude conveys urgency in guarding the trust: “I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 1:3; see also Philippians 1:27). To “contend” carries the idea of strenuously fighting for something, to give it everything you’ve got. The Bible includes a warning neither to add to nor subtract from God’s Word (Revelation 22:18-19). Rather than alter the apostles’ doctrine, we receive what has been passed down to us and keep it “as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:13).
3. Sound doctrine is important because *what we believe affects what we do*. Behaviour is an extension of theology, and there is a direct correlation between what we think and how we act. For example, two people stand on top of a bridge; one believes he can fly, and the other believes he cannot fly. Their next actions will be quite dissimilar. In the same way, a man who believes that there is no such thing as right and wrong will naturally behave differently from a man who believes in well-defined moral standards. In one of the Bible’s lists of sins, things like rebellion, murder, lying, and slave trading are mentioned. The list concludes with “whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine” (1

⁸<http://www.gotquestions.org/sound-doctrine.html#ixzz2S3bKB0zh>, (Accessed on August 18, 2013)

Timothy 1:9-10). In other words, true teaching promotes righteousness; sin flourishes where “the sound doctrine” is opposed.

4. Sound doctrine is important because *we must ascertain truth in a world of falsehood*. “Many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). There are tares among the wheat and wolves among the flock (Matthew 13:25; Acts 20:29). The best way to distinguish truth from falsehood is to know what the truth is.
5. Sound doctrine is important because *the end of sound doctrine is life*. “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:16). Conversely, the end of unsound doctrine is destruction. “Certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord” (Jude 1:4). Changing God’s message of grace is a “godless” thing to do, and the condemnation for such a deed is severe. Preaching another gospel (“which is really no gospel at all”) carries an anathema: “let him be eternally condemned!” (see Galatians 1:6-9).
6. Sound doctrine is important because *it encourages believers*. A love of God’s Word brings “great peace” (Psalm 119:165), and those “who proclaim peace . . . who proclaim salvation” are truly “beautiful” (Isaiah 52:7). A pastor “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:9).
7. The word of wisdom is “Do not remove the ancient landmark which your fathers have set” (Proverbs 22:28, NKJV). If we can apply this to sound doctrine, the lesson is that we must preserve it intact. May we never stray from “the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

V. **How to test Doctrines:**

- a. Does this doctrine teach about the Oneness of God in Jesus Christ or the plurality of persons in the God-head?
This is the most fundamental issue. The greatest command of God found in the Bible is “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” The only one God of the OT manifested Himself as human in the NT, but this should not confuse us to have different persons in the Godhead. Belief in the plurality of persons in the Godhead is believing in the plurality of God. God is one and His name One. Believing not Jesus as the God of the OT and the power of His name to save sinners leads to condemnation. (John 8:24; Acts 4:12). Each cult denies the central truth of the gospel that Jesus is God manifested in flesh, without beginning or ending. As a result, salvation is earned by adherence to the teachings of the cult rather than accepting Christ and obeying Him through love.
- b. Does this doctrine teach the importance of baptism and indwelling of the Holy Spirit?
Salvation is a free gift of God, to be received through faith. But faith without work is death. The faith that leads to salvation is the faith that moves the person to receive water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. After receiving baptism in the name of Jesus a person must seek the baptism and indwelling of the Holy Spirit by which he becomes a member of God’s family. Though the teaching is very clear from the Scriptures the cults do not see the necessity of this important teaching.
- c. Does this doctrine lead to holiness or careless living?

True doctrine of salvation carries with it the doctrine of true holiness without which no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). Holiness is costly but we should attempt to live a holy life at any cost. 2Th 2:13 *“God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth”*.

- d. Does this doctrine motivate a believer to evangelism?

The work of any minister, whether an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher is to “prepare God’s people for works of service” (Eph. 4:11,12). Doctrine without duty is a tree without fruit; duty without doctrine is a tree without roots, said Talbot Chambers⁹

- e. Does this doctrine teach the unity of believers?

Again the purpose of all ministries in the Church is to help saints keep the unity of the Spirit and bring them to the unity of the faith (Eph. 4:3,13). Jesus prayed, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one” (John 17:20,21).

Divisions are caused by doctrinal differences and unity is to be expected within the same denomination or holding the true doctrine. Teaching inter-denominationalism or pluralism is sin. But Christians should teach and strive to maintain unity in the body of Christ.

VI. The Spiritual Blessings of Sound Doctrine

- a. Salvation

Sound doctrine leads to salvation. Salvation for us and for those we teach. The main purpose of our existence is that we might receive God’s free gift of salvation. Salvation is through Jesus only (Acts 4:12; John 14:6) Comes from knowledge and application of the doctrine of the Gospel (Romans 1:16). Sound doctrine leads to sound faith and life.

- b. Comfort

Sound doctrine brings us to assurance of salvation which gives us comfort. Comfort even in the face of death (First Thessalonians 4:18; Psalm 23:4). I do not mean comfort in the absence of sound doctrine, since that is dangerous. Jesus promised to be with us (Mt. 28:20). And He is with us as the Comforter. As long as He is with us there is no fear but comfort.

- c. Peace

Love, Joy and Peace are the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) which only people who hold on to the Sound doctrine and receiving the baptism and indwelling of the Holy Spirit enjoys. Even in prison the apostles could enjoy these (Acts 16:25).

VII. Conclusion

There is a doctrine that is sound for its followers and there are doctrines which are not safe and sound for its followers. It is the duty of every believer to prove the correctness of their doctrine. 1Th 5:21 *“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good”*. The first and most important test question to ask of any church is, "What are their beliefs?" Are the teachings of this church consistent with the teachings of Jesus and the apostles? If the doctrines of that denomination are the teachings of Christ and the Bible, then that is God's church, and you should become a member and hang in there even if: the people are cantankerous and crabby, the singing sounds like feeding time at the zoo, the church building is a renovated hamburger stand, the pastor's sermons are so boring that the bats leave the belfry at 11 o'clock every Sabbath morning, the members are so divided that

⁹R. Stanley, p. 86

there is a fluorescent line painted down the middle of the sanctuary, the people come to church driving army tanks.¹⁰

¹⁰http://vip.hyperusa.com/~davislt/how_to_choose_a_church.htm, (Accessed on August 20, 2013)