



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

### THE PROBLEM WITH UNSOUND DOCTRINE (I TIM. 1:3-11)

Andy Baker

Paul told the Ephesian eldership with crystal clarity that unsound doctrine taught by false teachers would destroy the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:28-31). Some years later, one begins to wonder if Timothy the preacher was getting ready to leave that work in Ephesus for another, because it appears false teaching had reared its ugly head. Instead, Paul urges Timothy to "remain in Ephesus" and to deal with these teachers directly, sternly and authoritatively (see the word "charge" in verse 3). Paul knew that these teachers, teaching unhealthy doctrine would devastate the church. In verses 3-11, he tells Timothy what the unsound doctrine does.

**Unsound doctrine creates a fight that is a continual struggle (v. 3).**

"Remain," Paul says in the present tense, "that you may charge" (1 Tim. 1:3). It is a continual fight. As long as the earth stands, there will be the forces of evil acting on the church in order to get it to turn to the right or to the left (cf. Deut. 5:32; Jos. 23:6; 1 Tim. 4:1-3). In evaluation, it seems the devil does not care whether a congregation goes to the "right" or to the "left" as long as they go somewhere. Thus, some Christians will label everyone but themselves "unsound," and some Christians label EVERYONE as "sound" regardless of belief. Fighting against unsound doctrine is a challenge that must be renewed through every generation (cf. Josh. 24:15; Jude 3).

**Unsound doctrine causes fruitless questions where godly edification ought to be (vv. 4-6).**

Unsound doctrine takes what is good and profitable about the gospel to build up others and turns people's

attention away from it. It puts feel-good stories, unanswerable questions and following impossibilities as most important. It is an important theme in 1 Timothy. He was to guard himself and to warn others about "idle talk" (1:4), "doctrines of demons" (4:1), "profane and old wives' fables" (4:7); being "obsessed with disputes and arguments over words" (6:4-5), and "profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" (6:21). In application, one wonders if the Holy Spirit through Paul in this passage is warning 21st century Christians about online discussions, Facebook arguments, and endless posting encouraging disputes. Instead, ignoring those things, healthy teaching speaks the message of Jesus clearly and

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# Editor

Cody Westbrook



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

## THE GOAL OF SOUND DOCTRINE

(1 TIM. 1:12-17)

Cody Westbrook

Why do we place such a strong emphasis on sound doctrine? Why does God stress the importance of sound preaching and teaching so heavily throughout His Word? Does it really matter that much? Should we care? The first two major sections of 1 Timothy 1 help to answer these questions. In the first section (vss. 3-11) Paul discusses the problem of unsound doctrine. He says that it only causes problems—"disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith" (1 Tim. 1:4). False and unhealthy doctrine only serves to weaken our faith and produce more questions than answers. Over against the first stands the second main section (vss. 12-17), which deals with the goal, or aim, of sound doctrine. In this context Paul uses himself as "exhibit A" in order to show the reason that God insists so firmly on sound teaching. That is, sound doctrine, and only sound doctrine, produces salvation.

Sound doctrine aims to turn a man from a sinner to a saint (vss. 12-15). False teachers in Ephesus were teaching things that were untrue about salvation (1 Tim. 1:3-11). They placed all their emphasis on fables and genealogies, and used the law improperly. But those things have no ability to save; they only produce speculation! On the other hand, sound doctrine, when properly obeyed, results in salvation. Paul knew this well not only because that is what he preached but also because he had seen it unfold in his own life. Paul describes himself as a "blasphemer" (one who defames or speaks slanderously), a "persecutor" (one who pursues another with the intent to harm), and an "insolent man" (one who is violent and seeks to cause injury). He was a sinner for sure, an enemy of our Lord and His church—"the chief of sinners."

But Christ "enabled" him (strengthen, empower) and counted him "faithful" (trustworthy). "The grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant" toward Paul. That is, the unmerited favor of our Father and His Son overflowed in great excess toward him. He obtained mercy (pity, compassion) from the Lord because Jesus' purpose in coming to this world was to save sinners, just like Paul. The goal of preaching and teaching sound doctrine is to see this process unfold over and over again. False teaching will not save anyone, but the gospel of Christ will. It has the power to transform the rankest sinner into the most faithful of saints.

Additionally, sound doctrine will create people in the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:10) and allow them to be examples that others can look to (vs. 16). Paul says,

However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

Our dear brother Wayne Jackson summarized the point of this passage very well.

But Paul's point of emphasis here is God's providential selection of him as an irrefutable example of Heaven's love for man. If salvation was offered to the world's worse rogue, the bloodthirsty Saul, surely the patience of Christ shines forth as an example, indeed an incentive, to all who subsequently should believe on him (i.e., they are on the verge of committing themselves to a life of trust) with a view to life eternal (i.e., everlasting communion with God).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jackson, Wayne. *Before I Die, Paul's Letters to Timothy and Titus*. (Stockton, CA: Christian Courier, 2007), 45.

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That the blood of Christ was powerful enough to save the apostle Paul should stand as a constant reminder that it continues to be powerful enough to save anyone who is willing to obey the gospel, regardless of the sin he or she has committed. The unadulterated Word of God will completely transform our lives so that we may practice righteousness (Rom. 6:15-23) and live in such a way that we, like the apostle Paul, can say to others, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Unhealthy doctrine cannot accomplish that.

When we consider the marvelous power found in sound teaching (1 Tim. 1:12-17) versus the devastating impact of unsound teaching (1 Tim. 1:3-11) it is no wonder that Paul would end this section with a marvelous expression of praise to God. God is "King eternal," the self-existing ruler of the Universe. He is "immortal," that is, He is immune to decay or death; "invisible," unable to be seen with human eyes; and He is the "God who alone is wise," meaning there are no other gods beside Him and His wisdom is unmatched (cf. Rom. 11:33). Our great God is worthy of high esteem (honor) as we humble ourselves before His great power and majesty (glory). Why do we place such great importance on sound doctrine? Why does God emphasize its importance? Because He has crafted a system of teaching (cf. Eph. 4:5) that, when taught and obeyed faithfully, has the power to save our souls.

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CW

## **HOLD FAST TO SOUND DOCTRINE**

**(1 TIM. 1:18-20)**

Ross Haffner

**W**hen children are very little they have no concept of lying. The parent finds it easier to discipline at a stage where they have every expectation that the question, "Did you eat a cookie after I told you to wait?" will be answered honestly by their child. Jesus thanked the Father that He revealed truth to babes and hid it from those who were wise in their own sight (Matt. 11:25). This indicates that the hard part of holding fast to sound doctrine is not understanding what sound doctrine is, but rather having the strength to live by it.

Paul commanded Timothy to teach others to avoid

and reject false doctrine because that is the loving and right way to labor for God (1 Tim. 1:3-5). He alluded to that charge and the revelation that had been made to Timothy concerning his work as an evangelist in the latter part of the chapter when he wrote:

This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:18-20).

Though some had departed from the truth, Timothy could be strong because he had received the truth of God. The success that Satan has had in drawing many once stalwart soldiers away from teaching only the pure and simple gospel ought to garner our attention. Faithfulness requires work and a genuine love for God and His church. Remember that, in the Bible, you have the truth as delivered by God Himself. Teaching anything that is contrary to scripture betrays the loving work God has done for you. Timothy was charged by Paul to teach the truth so that sound doctrine could be recognized from error.

Truth is so precious that it is worth fighting for. Paul commands Timothy to "wage the good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18). A grueling battle awaits those who will confront the lies of the Devil. Paul knew that Timothy needed to be strong to overcome the tests before him. As an excellent example for Timothy, Paul names the false teachers who had been withdrawn from because of their error (1 Tim. 1:20). It takes boldness to contend for the faith (Jude 3).

Paul was not unloving in naming these wayward brothers. Love demanded that Paul do that which was in their best interest, and in the best interest of the brotherhood at large. Some rebuke with a mean spirit and lazily write off brothers who could be restored or who were never wrong in the first place. Others ignore known error in a congregation or preacher in hopes that they will "study their way out of it." Neither extreme is right. To be like Paul I need to be able to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Aquila and Priscilla were willing to take Apollos aside and explain "the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). Those bold enough to do so

in a biblical way should not be met with accusations of trying to be the brotherhood police. Just because some have waged war in an unlawful manner does not mean no one should do it at all. This must be done lovingly because there is a difference between a false teacher and a teacher who has mistakenly taught something false. Any Bible teacher should take James 3:1 to heart and respond humbly when approached in this manner.

Hymenaeus and Alexander made shipwreck of their faith (1 Tim. 1:20). This is not only because they taught error, but because they rejected faith and a good conscience. If Timothy was going to fulfill his charge he would need to teach truth, defend it, and live it out in his life (1 Tim. 1:19). Living by that which is preached is necessary. The scribes and Pharisees were rebuked because they did not hold themselves to the same standard by which they taught others to live (Matt. 23:3-4). Paul was able to have a good conscience despite His past (1 Tim. 1:12-17). He knew that the truth lovingly provided to him by God must be obeyed to obtain mercy.

If truth is taught it produces godliness because the law is for sinners that they might become obedient (1 Tim. 1:8-11). Ungodly teaching can only produce ungodly people. Like Timothy, I need to hold fast to sound doctrine if I am going to be saved.

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## THE ELDER'S ROLE IN ENSURING SOUND DOCTRINE

Rick Popejoy

Let us begin by acknowledging not just the possibility of false teaching and wicked men, but the certainty of it (1 Cor. 11:19). Nor, should we be surprised to find false teachers in the church today. Jesus and His apostles were very clear that false teachers will arise. In fact, they promised it! The apostle Paul warned the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:29-31) and his son in the faith, Timothy (2 Tim. 4:3-4) that false teachers are sure to come (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1-6). If we had any doubts at this point, Peter joins the chorus to add another note: "there shall be false teachers among you" (2 Pet. 2:1). So, we should not be caught off guard that false teachers

have arisen throughout church history and continue to multiply in our day (2 Tim. 3:13). My friend, if you cannot identify the sound of false teaching today, it's not because they aren't there, but because you're falling for their feigned words (plastrois, artificial, plastic, 2 Peter 2:3). In this vein, elders play an important role in ensuring that sound doctrine is both taught and practiced, first and foremost by feeding the flock (1 Pet. 5:2). This is the same commission Jesus gave to Peter "Feed my flock" (John 21:15-17). The idea here is to tend as a shepherd, by discipline and doctrine. Elders must also lead the flock by exhortation and example. Feeding and leading builds a strong flock.

All the above is accomplished because the elders take heed to themselves as well as the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers (Acts 20:28). The first order of business for these men who guard (prosechete, beware, pay or give attention to, attend to, keep a watchful eye on) the flock from predators is to guard their own heart and mind so that they might then be prepared to guard the flock entrusted to their care. There are temptations which are peculiar to or heightened because of the position of leadership which necessitate constant personal vigilance. Money, sex and power would be included, but not an exhaustive list (cf. 1 John 2:15-17). An elder must take heed that he not be given to greed: "not for filthy lucre" (1 Pet. 5:2) or pride: "being lords over God's heritage" (1 Pet. 5:3) or sensuality "a bishop then must be blameless" (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6). The shepherd of God's flock must love the truth, exhort the church to follow it, and live a life of holiness. A shepherd with poor vision will have difficulty seeing a predator or a diseased sheep.

According to the New Testament, elders are responsible for the primary leadership and oversight of a church. Elders lead the church (1 Tim. 5:17; Tit. 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2). They teach and preach the word (1 Tim. 3:2). They must also protect the church from false teachers (Acts 20:17, 28-31). While at the same time, exhorting and admonishing the saints in sound doctrine, visiting the sick, and praying for the flock (Jas. 5:14; Acts 6:4). In biblical terminology, elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church.

In closing, may I suggest several items of a practical nature for your consideration: First, practice hospitality (1 Tim. 3:2; cf. 1 Pet. 4:8-9) and engage in a rigorous visitation work (Jas. 5:14; cf. Matt. 25:36). Herein is a twofold privilege and commitment (John 10:1-5;

1 Thess. 5:12). Second, during this time of hospitality and visitation, elders should get to know the sheep – their weaknesses and their strengths. You cannot put together a plan of action until you know the person. For example, does the father of the household take responsibility for the nurture and admonition of the children in his care (Eph. 6:4)? If not, why not? What does he need in order to do his job? How can the elders help? Is the wife lending herself well as a helpmeet? How can the elder’s wives help her to become what she should be in the family? Third, elders must oversee the preacher and the pulpit. All unsound words must be stopped (Tit. 1:9). Any unwholesome lifestyle must be corrected (2 Tim. 3:10). The plague of preachers leading churches astray starts and finishes at the door of the presbytery (1 Tim. 4:14). Finally, elders must be willing and able to meet out discipline if necessary and after much admonishment. An elder that is unwilling to withdraw from a problematic member is not worthy to serve in the office.

In order to ensure sound doctrine, the elders must know what it is; practice it in their own lives; teach it themselves; demand it in the pulpit; mandate it in every classroom; and see that it is practiced in the lives of the sheep.

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## THE PREACHER’S ROLE IN ENSURING SOUND DOCTRINE

Joshua Rodriguez

**T**hough elders are appointed to oversee and instruct the local congregation, gospel preachers also share in the responsibility of providing biblical understanding for spiritual growth, mental health, and moral conditioning (cf. Acts 20:28; Tit. 2:1, 15). Ministers of the word of God have been solemnly exhorted, by the authority of the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, to assist in the healing and salvation of man’s soul (2 Tim. 4:1-2). The preacher’s work is part of a collective effort with elders, deacons, and evangelists “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12). Interestingly, the word “perfecting” comes from a medical term that makes

reference to the “setting of a bone” and “of a trainer who adjusts parts of the body.”<sup>1</sup> At its root, it also conveyed the idea “to render fit, sound, or complete.”<sup>2</sup> Throughout Scripture it is used with reference to “restore” the erring and to “fix deficiencies” in the development of faith (cf. Gal. 6:1; 1 Thess. 3:10). In the aforementioned Ephesian passage the figure connotes the equipping of God’s people for service through training or discipline. With this understanding in view, the concept of sound doctrine becomes clear, especially since Timothy had been left in Ephesus to serve as a gospel preacher (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3-10; Acts 18:5, 19).

Sound doctrine in its fundamental sense is “wholesome teaching.” The word “sound” was often used in the New Testament for someone who was in good physical health (cf. Luke 5:31; 3 John 2). However, applying this term to “doctrine” suggests, teaching that does not make whole physically, but spiritually. The law of God is spiritual, meaning it affects the inward man (Rom. 7:14). Hence, it is written, “Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16; cf. Rom. 12:2). Some lexicons avoid this connection confusing Greek-Hellenistic viewpoints as only referencing physical health. Contrary to their conclusions, the etymology of the Greek term informs us that “a specific use is for mental health and the faculty of rational thought.”<sup>3</sup> The ancient Greeks regarded soundness of mind to be health of the soul. Their understanding was not far from the truth. In Matthew’s account of the Gospel, Jesus explained, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matt. 11:28-29; cf. Matt. 13:14-15). In like manner, ministers of the word of God offer aid through sound doctrine to render the local congregation fit or complete in their spiritual health. As the song declares, “There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole” (cf. Jer. 8:22).

False doctrine has the opposite effect upon the soul. Erroneous concepts disease the mind with false inferences and invented stories destitute of truth (cf. 2 Tim. 2:14-18). As an example, consider Job’s

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1 Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, et al. [A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature](#) 2000 : 526. Print.

2 Thayer, Joseph Henry. [A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti](#) 1889 : 336. Print.

3 Luck, Ulrich. “Υγιής-Υγιαίνω.” Ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich. [Theological dictionary of the New Testament](#) 1964– : 308. Print.

friends, “The Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, my wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right...” (Job 42:7-8). Those who speak of God’s character and actions must be accurate in the things they teach and cause others to believe (Jas. 3:1; 1 Tim. 4:16). The preacher’s role in ensuring sound doctrine is to provide correct teaching that reorients the mind. The minister’s charge requires fortitude, as he is often challenged by subtle error, sympathetic appeals, and outright rebellion. Therefore, if a preacher will fulfill his duty, he must put the brethren in remembrance of the words of faith and moral teaching, which has been committed to him (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1-2, 6; 2 Tim. 4:2-4; Jude 3). His primary role is to administer the proper prescriptions of righteousness to adjust the character and conduct of the church—“For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life” (Prov. 6:23).

Gospel preachers serve as spiritual aides and must be trained to discern between good and evil (Heb. 5:11-14). In addition to systematic knowledge, the men of our pulpits must acquire the critical faculty of evaluating people, things, and circumstances which can either disease our thinking or promote our spiritual well-being (cf. 1 Tim. 6:20-21). God is true!

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## HOW CHURCH MEMBERS CAN ENSURE SOUND DOCTRINE

Rob L. Whitacre

**P**reaching is an active process for those sitting in the pews.

And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given (Mark 4:24).

As we sit at the feet of those who preach and teach the Word, we have an obligation to be careful in “what we hear.” Indeed, Paul warned us that there will be some who sit in the pews who can’t stomach sound doctrine; instead, they desire a false teacher to tickle their ears with error. Paul said,

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 Tim. 4:3-4).

Knowing this inspired fact, what can the faithful do to ensure they are constantly fed with sound doctrine?

**First, there must be preparation of mind when the Word is preached.** When Paul met the Bereans he said, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind . . .” (Acts 17:11). God expects us to reason together. Isaiah told the people,

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (1:18).

God wants us to understand His will, and in fact, He commands it. “Wherefore be ye not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17). This understanding is achieved when we read and hear His Word (Eph. 3:4; Rom. 10:17). We should never close our minds, become agitated, and/or ignore the Word of God when it is taught or preached. If a simple reading of the Bible makes one uncomfortable, he/she has a problem. When we come before the Scripture, our minds should be prepared and our heart receptive.

**Second, there must be an investigation of the message when the Word is preached.** Paul continued by writing, “. . . and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). As we listen to teachers of the Word, we must compare what they are saying with what God has written. Paul wrote, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). John wrote, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). The Bible is the only standard for Truth, and it must be searched daily to ensure sound doctrine is maintained (John 8:32; John 17:17). The standard for right and wrong is not the education or stature of a man but the adherence of and faithfulness to the Book!

**Third, there must be preservation of the message when the Word is preached.** Anytime someone

misuses Scripture to advance religious error, the righteous must stand up and preserve the Truth. Error must be defeated, or it will continue spreading throughout the Body and contaminate the saved.

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 (Rom. 16:17-18).

Each generation is responsible for protecting the truth for each successive generation. We must, "Buy the truth, and sell it not; also, wisdom, and instruction, and understanding" (Prov. 23:23). Satan is the master of misquoting, misapplying, and misusing God's Word. If he tried it with the Son of God, he is certainly going to try it today (Matt. 4:1-11; 2 Cor. 11:14-15).

Someday, we will kneel before the King of kings and Lord of lords and give an account for what we have heard. Do we bow before the altar of false doctrine and allow it to go unchecked and unchallenged? Do we stand up for the Truth, challenge false teachers and expose error? The church of tomorrow depends upon how the church of today ensures sound doctrine.

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plainly that can do someone good! If healthy doctrine is sacrificed, an edifying and godly look into the Bible is exchanged for a grotesque theater for the idle talkers.

### **Unsound doctrine puts the important emphasis on the teacher of it (v. 7).**

Here are Christians who desire to be teachers of the gospel. However, these teachers have two glaring problems: 1) they don't understand what they are saying. 2) they do not understand the things they are affirming. At the end of 2 Timothy, Paul cautioned that, "the time will come when they [people hearing the truth] will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). The motivating force in this passage for these people is upon "teachers we like to listen to" and not the Wonderful Words of Life. When a teacher puts down his Bible and takes up his storybook, truth will take a backseat and God will be neither pleased nor glorified.

It takes man's lusts and insists they are the will of God (vv. 8-11). The things in verse 8-11 are things the law speaks about in its goodness. Here, the righteous look at these things and simply say, "I used to live in those things, but no longer because I belong to Christ" (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Titus 2:11-12). These things are "contrary to sound doctrine" (1:10). If these teachers in verse 3-4, and 6 begin to preach and teach any "other doctrine," what results will be a teaching that is a thin and sickly shadow of righteousness, but the unsound teaching will invariably incorporate one or more of these evils listed in verses 9-10. If someone is teaching or preaching something that logically concludes or leads to the assumption that any of the items in verses 9 and 10 are ok for a Christian to do, this person is peddling a doctrine that is not healthy and they are not sound themselves. It is so important that men hold fast to sound words and charge others not to teach any other doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3). Unsound doctrine will create unsound lives.

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