

WHAT IS A “SOUND” CHURCH?

A. “Is it a sound church?” is a common question among Christians.

1. And although there are different views as to what makes a sound church, most of us understand that a sound church confines itself to the NT pattern of the local church (work, worship & organ.).
2. By the word “sound” we mean “healthy; not weak, diseased, or impaired (think body); firm, safe, secure (think house); based on truth or valid reasoning (think of God’s word); accurate, reliable, sensible; morally strong; honest, honorable, loyal (think of one who is obedient to God’s word).”

B. If Christians can be sound, then churches can be sound.

1. But what is the basis of a sound Christian & a sound church?

1 Tim 1:9-11 – knowing this: that **the law** is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless & insubordinate, for the ungodly & for sinners, for the unholy & profane, for murderers of fathers & murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, & if there is any other thing that is contrary to **sound doctrine**, **according to the glorious gospel** of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.

1 Tim 6:3-5 – If anyone teaches otherwise & does not consent to **wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, & to the doctrine which accords with godliness**, 4 he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes & arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, 5 useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds & destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

2 Tim 1:13 – **Hold fast the pattern of sound words** which you have heard from me, in faith & love which are in Christ Jesus.

2 Tim 4:3 – For the time will come when they will not endure **sound doctrine**,...

Titus 1:9 – holding fast **the faithful word** as he has been taught, that he may be able, by **sound doctrine**, both to exhort & convict those who contradict.

Titus 2:1 – But as for you, speak the things which are proper for **sound doctrine**:

[We see then that “sound doctrine” will make sound Christians & thus sound churches: healthy & equipped to do the work the Lord would have it do.]

I. WERE ALL THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES ALWAYS SOUND?

A. The church at Corinth was embroiled in a battle for soundness from its beginning.

1 Cor 3:1-3 – And *I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal*, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk & not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, & even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. ***For where there are envy, strife, & divisions among you, are you not carnal & behaving like mere men?***

1 Cor 5:1-2 – ***It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, & such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles*** — that a man has his father's wife! 2 And you are puffed up, & have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.

1 Cor 6:5-6 – I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? 6 But ***brother goes to law against brother, & that before unbelievers!***

1 Cor 11:17-18, 22 – Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, ***I hear that there are divisions among you***, & in part I believe it....What! Do you not have houses to eat & drink in? Or do you despise the church of God & shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.

B. The churches (plural) of Galatia were also embroiled in a battle for soundness.

Gal 1:2-9 – Grace to you & peace from God the Father & our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God & Father, 5 to whom be glory forever & ever. Amen. 6 ***I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ***, to a different gospel, 7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you & want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

Gal 3:1 – ***O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth***, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?

Gal 5:6-7 – For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. 7 ***You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?***

[The church at Corinth & the churches throughout Galatia may not have realized it at the time, but from the moment they rose up together with Christ, from the waters of their baptism, each member had to put on the armor of God & fight tooth & nail to maintain the soundness of the church; & there were times when it looked like they might lose the battle – *this battle is a fact of life for the church in every generation.*]

II. MISCONCEPTIONS REGARDING WHAT MAKES A SOUND CHURCH

A. A sound church is NOT just a church that is NOT LIBERAL.

1. Webster: “broadminded, tolerant; not bound by authoritarianism [authority], orthodoxy [the way it is currently being done], or traditional forms [the way it has always been done].”
2. We refer to a congregation as being liberal when it is involved in work for which there is no NT authority, or when it does not follow the NT pattern for the scriptural work it does.
3. So just because a congregation does NOT go beyond the NT patterns (doctrine) in its work – or just because it does NOT advocate a social gospel, does not make that church sound.
 - a. That would be like saying, *“I’m a Christian because I don’t get drunk & cheat on my wife.”*

- b. One is not a Christian simply for what he does NOT do, but mainly for what he does, the actions he takes in obedience to Christ.

As I was writing this point, I received a telephone call from someone in marketing department for the Colts baseball team. He asked if the leader of our youth group would be interested getting the young people involved in selling tickets to the Colt’s games of which \$3 dollars of each ticket could go to our youth programs.

[Well, we’re not a sound church just because I turned down an opportunity that a liberal church would jump at.]

B. A sound church is not just a church that is SOUND IN DOCTRINE.

1. We’ve mentioned the church at Corinth & the Galatian’ churches, & their lack of soundness, now let’s notice the church at Ephesus.

Rev 2:2-5 (Ephesus) – “I know your works, your labor, your patience, & that you cannot bear those who are evil. And **you have tested those who say they are apostles & are not, & have found them liars**; 3 & you have persevered & have patience, & have labored for My name's sake & have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless **I have this against you, that you have left your first love**. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent & do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly & remove your lampstand from its place — unless you repent.”

1. Of course their first love was Jesus Christ, & every-thing they did initially was out of love for their Savior.
2. But over time their love for Him, & for His body & the work they were supposed to be doing together had grown cold & lifeless – *they were just going through the motions*.
3. Oh they were testing the teachers who came among them by comparing their doctrines to the truth, & the church was turning the false teachers, but that faithful act alone did not make them a sound church.

As I was writing this point, I received another telephone call from a man who wanted to know how I received my call to preach. He felt like he was being called & wanted to know what he should do first. I asked him about his religious affiliation & he answered, “I was raised in the church of Christ, but I am not a member of any church.” I responded, “Well then, the first thing you need to do repent & be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins. The Lord will then add you to His body the church. Then you can begin to study His word & grow in faith to point that you will be able to teach others. He hung up somewhere after the word baptized.”

[The church at Ephesus was doctrinally sound, & defended for the truth, but they were not a sound church for that reason alone at the time Jesus addressed them in Revelation.]

C. **A sound church** is not just a church that is SOUND MATERIALLY.

1. Just because a church is able to maintain a certain amount of dollars in its bank account, & just because it can meet & surpass its budget every year, & just because the building is well kept & the parking lot paved, & just because it supports gospel preachers in other places, & just because they have an amazing website – does not make that church sound church.

Rev 3:15-17 (Laodicea) – “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, & neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. **Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, & have need of nothing'**-- & do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, & naked.”

2. The easiest thing in the world is for a church to become self sufficient; this happens when the members begin to think that they have reached a plateau of wealth where they can just begin to take life easy.

“We have the best preacher in three states, a compatible eldership, good Bible classes, a yearly lectureship, we’re able to send money for benevolence & evangelism overseas, my mortgage is paid, I’m able to keep up my payments on the motor home & our timeshare. Life is good.”

3. Yes, but when was the last time you personally became a servant to others as Jesus was...?
4. When was the last time you gave God the glory for your abilities & for blessing you with the abundance you enjoy so that you could personally use those things to edify, encourage & strengthen your brethren?

[The church at Laodicea was materially sound, but they were not a sound church.]

D. **A sound church** is not just a church that is SOUND BY REPUTATION.

1. We don’t want to diminish the importance of this congregation having a reputation for soundness, but that alone does not make us a sound church.

Rev 3:1-3 (Sardis) – These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God & the seven stars: **“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Be watchful, & strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 Remember therefore how you have received & heard; hold fast & repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, & you will not know what hour I will come upon you.”**

E. **A sound church** is not just a church that is ACTIVE in some ways.

1. An active church is great but not at the expense of neglecting the “whole counsel of God”.

Rev 2:19-20 (Thyatira) – I know your works, love, service, faith, & your patience; & **as for your works, the last are more than the first.** 20 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because **you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach & seduce My servants** to commit sexual immorality & eat things sacrificed to idols.

CLOSING

A. **You may be saying**, “That doesn’t leave much room for any church to be entirely sound.”

1. It really doesn’t does it?
2. The battle of a congregation to maintain its soundness is an ongoing battle & every member must be fully engaged in the conflict with the armor of God & the sword of the Spirit.
3. Next week we’ll explore the characteristics of a “sound” (healthy, firm, strong & loyal) church.