

It Is Written

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SOUND IN THE FAITH

By Ken Weliever

The late Robert Jackson was one of my mentors as a young preacher. He used to preach a sermon in meetings he called "Put Your Finger on the Passage."

As I recall, Robert would introduce ideas that folks had about the Bible, some accurate and some inaccurate, and then say, "Put your finger on the passage."

He would then open the Bible and read what God said about the issue. Whether the topic was salvation, worship, or the church, Robert's challenge was simple: Put your finger on the passage. If the Bible taught it, embrace it. If Scripture did not support it, reject it.

This was Robert's way of underscoring an old Restoration plea for Bible authority often echoed in the phrase, "Give me book, chapter, and verse." This slogan and Robert's sermon have a scriptural basis in the use of the word "sound" in Paul's epistles.

In his letters to Timothy and Titus, Paul often uses the word "sound" to identify the importance and accuracy of truth. "Sound doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:10). "Sound in the faith" (Tit. 2:2). "Sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13). "Sound speech" (Tit. 2:8). "Sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7).

In years past, I've heard the word "sound" used to ask, "Is this a sound church?" Often, the definition of "sound" was narrowed to one or two prominent issues in the brotherhood. Those matters may be important, but the biblical concept of soundness is much broader than a single issue or area of concern.

The word "sound" means healthy. Thayer says it means "to be well, to be in good health." It is used metaphorically to speak of spiritual health.

A physician does not determine a person's health by examining only one part of the body. Likewise, God does not measure spiritual health by one isolated doctrine or practice. Just as physical health depends on a variety of factors, so does spiritual health.

Too often, we define our spirituality by what we don't do. How we're not like the world. Or we may look at a church and compare it to another church that is not following the Bible.

However, being spiritually healthy is not defined simply by the absence of error or sin, but by what we do. How are we living? Not just what we believe, but what we practice. It digs deeper into motives. It examines the condition of the spiritual heart.

It is possible to be sound in our arguments and unsound in our attitudes. It is possible to defend truth while failing to demonstrate the love, humility, and compassion that truth produces.

"Sound doctrine" and "sound teaching" must obviously be based on Scripture. I've heard people say they visited a church where the preacher never read a single Bible verse. How can such teaching be healthy?

I've had people justify doctrinal positions not found in the Bible by saying, "Well, that's our tradition." How is that healthy?

Often, churches change positions on moral issues, arguing that society has changed and the practice is no longer accepted. But if the practice violates Scripture, isn't that unhealthy?

Views on marriage have shifted dramatically in my lifetime. But has the Bible changed? Do the prevailing practices socially approved conform to "sound doctrine"?

Furthermore, a church may be called "sound" not merely because it conforms to a few commonly

discussed issues, but because it teaches, preaches, and practices what the Bible says in all areas. Sadly, some churches are sound asleep to the current issues and challenges of the 21st century.

Some shepherds are sound asleep regarding their feeding, protection, leadership, and vision for the flock of God under their care (Acts 20:28-32).

Some preachers are sound asleep to their responsibility to “preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:1-2), not personal opinions, political agendas, or human traditions.

Some Christians are sound asleep to their discipleship duties “to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18).

Some parents are sound in providing for their children’s physical needs, but neglect the greater responsibility of spiritual training (Eph. 6:1-4).

We need to put our finger on the passage for what we believe if we want to embrace sound doctrine. But it is just as important to practice what we profess if we want to live a spiritually healthy life.

The greatest danger may not simply be being unsound. It may be that we believe we are sound while we have become spiritually asleep.

What about you? Are you sound in the faith?

Toward Better Communication

By Sewell Hall

“This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger, for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.” (James 1:19-20)

Can you imagine better advice for getting along with others? How often we hear it said that the problem in a family, a plant, an office, a school, or even a church is a breakdown of communication. Obedience to this verse would change all of that.

“Be quick to hear.” Listen! Try to understand where the one who is talking “is coming from” and what he or she really means. See if you can repeat what was said so accurately that the one who said it will agree that you have stated the position accurately.

Now, make sure a reply is needed. We do not have to correct every mistake we hear. Some are not serious enough to require attention. Others, though serious, may have to wait for a more suitable time to be corrected.

Even if a reply is needed, take your time. “Be slow to speak.” Think of what you are saying. Think how it will sound to the one hearing it and how it will sound if it is repeated to someone else. Ask yourself if what you are about to say will do good or do harm. Ask God to help you to say only what needs to be said. Nehemiah was asked a question by the king and managed a prayer before he answered (Neh. 2:4-5). Remember that once you have spoken, you cannot recall your words.

Above all, “be slow to anger.” Anger almost always breaks down communication; shouting matches seldom end in a better understanding of each other. And, besides jeopardizing human relationships, they endanger our relation with God. We may fancy that our anger is “righteous indignation,” but the Holy Spirit says: “The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.”

Are you thinking, “That’s not much of a way to win an argument”? RIGHT! But it is a pretty good way to stop one. How would you like to try to argue with someone who is “quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger”?