

What Is A Sound Church?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction: The day the church began - Matt. 16:16-19; Acts 2:36-47

A. George Santayana, Winston Churchill, Edmund Burke, et al - Those who will not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

1. Jesus has not changed His will for the church - Heb. 13:8
2. We will follow the pattern He authorized - 2Tim. 1:13
3. We will not consider changing His plan - 1Cor. 4:6

B. What is "sound"?

1. Sound - "Free from flaw, defect or decay; undamaged, unimpaired healthy, firm strong safe, trustworthy, stable, founded in truth and rightness, not fallacious or faulty; showing good judgment or sense; thorough, orthodox in religion."
2. Sound body, sound health - "Free from injury, damage, disease; healthy, to be robust, well; uncorrupt."
3. Sound judgment - "Complete, sensible, valid."
4. Sound advice - "Having no defect as to truth, justice, wisdom, or reason."
5. Sound morals - "Of substantial, enduring character."
6. Sound reasoning - "Following in a systematic pattern without any apparent defect in logic."
6. Sound sleep - "Uninterrupted and untroubled."

C. All carry the principle of a complete and unadulterated pattern - 2Tim. 1:13.

D. How is the word "sound" used in the New Testament?

1. Luke 15:27; Acts 3:16; 1Tim. 1:10-11; 2Tim. 1:7, 4:3; Titus 1:9, 13, 2:1-2, 8

E. What is a sound church?

1. A church that follows the doctrine of Christ in a thorough, valid, uncorrupted, systematic pattern without any defect as to truth.
2. 1Cor. 4:6 - The proof text for this study.
3. Over the next few Sundays, we will study the New Testament doctrine regarding the nature of a sound, faithful church.

F. Elements of a sound church:

1. The organization, work, worship, name, and spirit

G. Apostasy and digression

1. Institutionalizing Christianity
2. Erasing the line between individual and collective works
3. Arguments made in defense of institutional digressions
4. The language of Ashdod – "Liberal-speak"

I. THE ORGANIZATION OF A SOUND CHURCH

A. 1Cor. 4:6 - "That you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written."

B. Proper leadership: Phil. 1:1

1. The elders are the servants of Christ and His church.
2. The deacons serve under the guidance of the elders.

- a. Appointing elders - 1Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-11, 13
 - b. In every church - Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23
 - c. The work of elders - Acts 20:28; 1Peter 5:1-3
 - d. Proper treatment of elders - Heb. 13:7, 17; 1Tim. 5:17-20
 - e. Appointing deacons - 1Tim. 3:8-13
 - f. The work of deacons - Acts 6:1-4
- 4. Irony that in Christ's doctrine, leader means the same as servant.
- C. Proper fellowship: Members and their responsibilities...
 - 1. The saints (members) make up the local church, and everyone has responsibilities.
 - a. To the church - Eph. 4:1-3, 7, 11-16
 - b. To each other - Eph. 5:21; Phil. 2:1-4
 - c. To unbelievers - 1Peter 3:15
- D. Proper fellowship: preachers and the word.
 - 1. The evangelist, who is one of the members and a servant of the word.
 - 2. 1Cor. 2:2, 1:21; Rom. 10:13-15, 9:1-3; Acts 20:26-27, 31; James 3:1; 1Cor. 1:10; 1Peter 4:11; 2John 9-11; Eph. 5:11
- E. Any other form of organization for the local church is not authorized.
 - 1. Any organization in this world that is larger than the local church is not authorized. Local churches are entirely autonomous.

II. THE WORK OF A SOUND CHURCH

- A. 1Cor. 4:6 - "That you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written."
- B. Evangelism, the first and primary work of any local church.
 - 1. It is the church's duty to spread the Gospel - Acts 8:4; 1Thes. 1:8
 - 2. It is the church's duty to develop men for this work. 2Tim. 4:1-2, 2:2
 - 3. To teach and save the lost is the reason Jesus came to this world, died on the cross and established the church - Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16
- C. Edification, the vital work of strengthening the disciples.
 - 1. Acts 9:26-31; 1Cor. 14:15-17; 2Cor. 12:19, 13:10; Eph. 4:29, 16
 - 2. Where and when is this edification to be done? - Heb. 10:23-25
- D. Limited benevolence, the care of disciples stricken by circumstances.
 - 1. Acts 2:44-45, 4:34-35, 6:1-3, 11:27-30; Rom. 15:25-27; 1Cor. 16:1-3; 2Cor. 8:3-7, 9:1-15; 1Tim. 5:4-5, 9-11, 16
 - 2. It is limited by Divinely approved examples of supporting preachers on an autonomous basis only - Phil. 4:10, 15-18; 2Cor. 11:8-9
 - 3. "Why not use Gal. 6:10 and James 1:27 in justifying the church offering benevolence to anyone in need?"
 - 4. These passages regulate individual, not collective, Christians' duties.

III. THE WORSHIP OF A SOUND CHURCH

- A. 1Cor. 4:6 - "That you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written."
- B. Nature of worship - Psalms 95:1-3, 122:1; Habakkuk 2:20; John 4:23-24
- C. Prayer - Acts 12:5; Col. 4:2-3
- D. Singing - Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16
- E. Communion - How? 1Cor. 11:23-26

- 1. When? - Acts 20:7; 1Cor. 11:18, 20, 33
- F. Offering - 1Cor. 16:1-2
- G. Preaching - Acts 20:7, 2:42, 6:2

IV. THE NAME OF A SOUND CHURCH

- A. 1Cor. 4:6 - "That you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written."
- B. If we must use Bible authority for all of these other things, we must use Bible authority in identifying the local church.
- C. Rom. 16:16; Matt. 16:18; Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:22-23, 5:23-25; Col. 1:18; 2John 9
 - 1. Whose name should the church wear?
- D. Since:
 - 1. Since the apostles called it the church of Christ,
 - 2. Since Jesus promised to build His church,
 - 3. Since Jesus paid for the church with His blood,
 - 4. Since God made Jesus Christ head of the church,
 - 5. Since Jesus is preeminent in the church,
 - 6. Since Christ's doctrine is the only faith permitted to be taught in the church,
 - 7. Then, whose name should the church wear?

V. THE PEOPLE OF A SOUND CHURCH

- A. 1Cor. 4:6 - "That you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written."
- B. Are saved - Acts 2:47
- C. Are saved the Lord's way
 - 1. Believe - Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:6; John 8:24
 - 2. Repent - Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38
 - 3. Confess - Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:10
 - 4. Baptism - Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16
- D. Are sound - Titus 1:13-14, 2:7-8
- E. Are holy- Titus 2:11-14
- F. Are busy - Titus 3:8, 14
- G. Are special - Col. 3:1-15

VI. ARGUMENTS MADE IN DEFENSE OF INSTITUTIONAL DIGRESSIONS

- A. "If we just loved one another more, we could solve our differences."
 - 1. Difficult to disagree with; no one wants to be viewed as unreasonable and unloving.
 - 2. Eph. 4:15 - "But, speaking the truth in love..."
 - a. Love does not precede nor supersede the purity of truth.
 - b. True love produces honesty; misguided love attempts to justify altering the truth.
 - 3. "The suggestion was made repeatedly that if we just loved each other more, we could solve our differences as if the division resulted simply from a lack of love and brotherly kindness. Certainly in any schism and in the heat of controversy,

brethren on both sides may exhibit bitterness, malice and even hatred. This is regrettable and absolutely wrong regardless of which side is guilty. However, any careful listener to this and other discussions on these issues knows that our differences are much deeper than that and are growing even deeper" (Tom Oglesby, "The Nashville Meeting: A Nashville Preacher's Perspective," GOT 1/19/89, p 16).

B. "We need a new way of establishing Bible authority."

"Johnny Ramsey and Stafford North spoke against church support of colleges, but Calvin Warpula, Bill Swetmon and Richard Rogers argued for "a new hermeneutic," for a new way of establishing Bible authority. Reuel Lemmons said direct commands, approved apostolic examples and necessary inferences as a way to establish Bible authority could not be found before 1800 A.D. Swetmon argued that since there was no complete New Testament before the fourth century, there could not have been a New Testament pattern for the work, worship, and organization of the church as we know it. Hence, we cannot bring in our "man-made" conclusions, reasonings and inferences in establishing a Bible pattern, plan or blueprint to guide the church in its activities."

"Swetmon, Rogers, Warpula and others contended that Christ, not formerly unavailable New Testament documents, is our authority. They recommended that we content ourselves with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and look to Jesus as our pattern and not to Acts or the epistles which, they affirmed, were not accessible to the church in the first three centuries" (Larry Ray Hafley, "Reflections on the Nashville Meeting," GOT 1/19/89, p 49).

1. Paul taught the same things in every place by the authority of Christ.
 - a. 1Cor. 2:2, 4:17, 7:17, 11:1-2, 23, 16:1
2. The word of the truth of the Gospel was preached in the entire world.
 - a. Col. 1:5-6, 23
3. The faith was one time delivered to the saints - Jude 3
4. The pattern was taught to all and put in writing
 - a. 2Tim. 1:13, 2:2; Rev. 1:11
5. They spoke what the Lord authorized - 1John 4:6
6. The will of God for the Church and the members was universally preached and practiced before Peter died; he was simply reminding them of what had already been taught.
 - a. 2Peter 1:3, 12-21, 3:1-2
7. The pattern of organization, work, and worship for the Church was established and taught when the Church began.
8. Cannot go beyond what is written - 1Cor. 4:6; 1Peter 4:11; 2John 9-11

C. "There is no doctrine of Christ, only the doctrine about Christ."

"In Nashville, the liberals argued that 2John 9 was a reference to the doctrine about Christ and his person, not the doctrine that Christ taught. (Compare the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and the doctrine of the Pharisees--Matt. 16:12; Rev. 12:15. Was that a reference to the doctrine about the Pharisees and the Nicolaitans, or was it a reference to their doctrine or teaching?). All we need do they contended, is to be right about the deity of Christ and not worry about a "pattern theology"." (Hafley, p 49).

2. Matt. 16:12 - Doctrine of the Pharisees; is it the doctrine they taught or the doctrine about them?
3. Rev. 2:15 - Doctrine of the Nicolaitans, is it the doctrine they taught or

the doctrine about them?

4. Gal. 1:6-12 - What Paul taught came directly from Jesus Christ -15-22.

D. "We just need to tear down our fences and include one another."

"Calvin (Warpula) related a touching story about a dead man whose family wanted him to be buried in a "church cemetery." Since the man was not of the same faith of that church's cemetery, he was buried outside the fence. (I suppose you could say the man had a dead faith.) The family was saddened, crushed, because their loved one was excluded from the fellowship of the dead. The excluding "pastor" was so touched by their sorrow that he rebuilt the fence around the dead man's grave, thus including him in the corps of corpses. When the dead man's family saw the pastor's change of heart, they were glad and thankful. What a benevolent, loving pastor! He tore down his disbaring, exclusive fence and included the deceased in the dormitory of the dead. Conclusion? We "antis" should remove our fences to include those from whom we are separated. If we have the love we should have, our hardened hearts will melt and we can remove our barriers to fellowship and include our liberal brethren."

"This sounds good. It is a touching, tender story, but it does not appeal to Scripture. It is an emotional argument. So, we ask brother Warpula if he should remove his anti-instrumental music fence to include the Christian Church? Should he remove his anti-sprinkling fence to include Methodists and other sprinkler systems? Should he remove the fence of baptism for the remission of sins in order to include Baptists? Should he remove his elders in every church fence to include the Boston-Crossroads funeral procession? Or should there be a fence?" (Oglesby, p 18).

2. Emotionalism never answered a scriptural question.

3. "Look at all of those poor orphans, we need to make them an orphans' home." I could draw just as many tears by describing life for them in an orphan's home rather than in our homes, which is God's way.

E. Are we drawing closer together? Should we?!?

"This good spirit that prevailed might cause some to think that we are drawing closer together. Nothing could be further from the truth! If some of the speakers are representative of the "liberal" mainstream, and I believe that they are, the gap between us is a vast and uncross-able chasm. There were times when the thought occurred to me that we were not even playing in the same ball park, let alone on the same team."

"During this discussion, it occurred to me that I was actually listening to real, genuine "Church of Christ" preachers rather than "gospel" preachers. Their concept of the church, Bible authority and evangelism is as denominational and unscriptural as any proclaimed by the sectarians over the years... When brethren deny that the Bible is a pattern in any respect, declare that commands, examples and necessary inferences are old hat, proclaim the need for a new system of hermeneutics to reach the modern world, and declare that the church can do anything that is not specifically prohibited, we have a denomination in spirit if not in name" (Oglesby, p 16).

F. Is Institutionalism a non-issue? Can we ignore our differences?

1. There is no scriptural defense for updating the faith.

2. It won't be long before erring brethren deny the Deity of Christ and the eternal destiny of the soul.

3. They are developing into a denomination of men. We must stop calling the progressively institutional congregations "our liberal brethren."

4. If we don't stand firmly against this heresy in every generation, we will stand with them in Judgment Day awaiting perdition.
5. We don't need a new attitude toward Institutionalism or Bible authority.

VII. INSTITUTIONALIZING CHRISTIANITY

A. How to justify the unjustifiable:

1. Excessively emphasize the emotional aspect of the issue.
2. De-emphasize the N.T. pattern for the work of the church.
3. Exalt the relative physical good accomplished by the human institution.
4. Condemn anyone who questions the liberal practice.
5. Followed carefully, this process will justify any error.

B. The institutional approach to N.T. commands is comforting and convenient to the 21st century errorist.

1. It allows the elders and deacons to avoid their duty in overseeing their stewardship by simply passing the work on to an institution.
2. It allows the members to avoid their duty of being personally involved in the needs of the afflicted, by expecting the church and the institution to take care of the problem. They come to believe they have completed their individual responsibilities the moment they make their offering.
3. Religious liberalism is just like political liberalism... set up a large, expensive, inefficient program and avoid personal involvement by throwing money at the problem.

VIII. ERASING THE LINE BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE WORKS

A. Context of Galatians 6 - Personal duties:

1. The church is never mentioned.
2. Is it possible for the church to accomplish these tasks as a collectivity?
3. Are there individual and collective tasks in the New Testament?

B. Exegesis:

1. Vs 1 - Limited to "spiritual" ones; self-examination
2. Vs 2 - Personal pronouns; individual reciprocity
 - a. Rom. 15:1; James 2:8
3. Vs 3 - Personal pronouns that cannot be applied to a collectivity; pride is an individual sin; self-deceit not a collective action.
4. Vs 4 - Self-examination is not a congregational task
 - a. 1Cor. 11 - "Himself alone and not in another."
5. Vs 5 - Personal pronouns; individual load-bearing
6. Vs 6 - Personal pronouns; distinction between teacher and student
7. Vs 7 - Singular pronouns; judged, rewarded and punished based on individual actions
8. Vs 8 - See Vs 7
9. Vs 9 - "We" as individuals; see Vs 7-8
10. Vs 10 - Same "we" of previous verses; not all individuals in church will have opportunity; not all have the same needs, opportunities, service, and performance
 - a. "We" - Was Paul a member there? Promoting an organization

larger than the church? Or was he referring to all Christians everywhere as individuals?

11. Consequences of collective action...

- a. Takes whole chapter out of context,
- b. Defies the rules of grammar,
- c. Ignores the rules of hermeneutics,
- d. Engages the church in unauthorized works,
- e. Promotes error and false doctrine,
- f. Allows the individual to shift his responsibility to the group.

C. Exegesis of James 1:26-27

1. Compare to 1Tim. 5 and support of widows. Some were not eligible to be supported by the church; some by individuals.

D. The illogical nature of the "no distinction between individual and collective action" position.

1. Duties to one's wife and children; can the whole church get involved?
2. 1Cor. 16:1-2 - Can an individual maintain his own personal treasury for the work of the church?
3. 1Cor. 5:4-5 - Can one Christian discipline another without the church being involved?
4. 1Cor. 11:17-34 - Can a Christian hold a communion service for himself alone at home?
5. 1Cor. 11:22 - "Have you not houses?"
 - a. "You can do anything in the building that you do in your home."
 - b. Can the Church operate a small business in the building?
 - c. Can the Church sing accompanied by an instrument?

E. Exegesis on James 1:26-27

IX. THE LANGUAGE OF ASHDOD

A. Neh. 13:23-24

B. Ashdod, or Azotus, now called Eshdud. One of five major city-states of Philistia, the most powerful at that time. Located between Gaza and Joppa, it was three miles from the Mediterranean shore. The land was given to Judah, but never really controlled by them. Strategic in that it was located on the road to Egypt. Its chief importance to us is that their language was unfit for the mouths of God's children.

C. Effects of the language of Ashdod on the children of Israel.

1. Separated Israelite children from their true heritage – Deut. 6:1-15
2. Prevented proper teaching of the Law of Moses. (couldn't read it)
3. Prevented proper hearing of the Law of Moses. (couldn't understand it)
4. God's will was gradually replaced by idolatry.

D. Language of Ashdod among digressives today

1. Pulpit minister, youth minister, music minister, worship leaders, retreats, fellowshiping, bus ministry, junior worship, singles ministry...
2. "My church, our church" – It is the Lord's church.
3. Contemporary speech translations of the Bible.
4. Casual speech in worship.

- E. What will be the effect of digressives speaking in ancient Ashdod?
1. Children will grow up not knowing what a sound church is.
 2. They will not hear the word of God taught in its purity and majesty.
 3. They will not recognize it when they do hear it.
 4. God's sound doctrine is gradually replaced by the teachings of denominational churches of Christ.

X. ATTEMPTING TO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH AN UNSOUND CHURCH

- A. What is the moral condition of an unsound church?
1. Ephesus was practicing most of the doctrine of Christ; however, they had left their first love, even though they were addressed as a church.
 - a. Rev. 2:1-4
 - b. Jesus told them to return to the original faith and repent, or He would no longer recognize them - Rev. 2:5
 2. Pergamos was a dedicated group of Christians standing fast against opposition; however, they were having fellowship with brethren involved in two religious errors. - Rev. 2:12-15
 - b. Jesus told them to repent or He would stand against them.
 - c. Rev. 2:16
 3. Thyatira was a loving and active congregation; however, they were in fellowship with one false teacher. - Rev. 2:18-19
 - b. Jesus told them to repent or He would violently oppose them with suffering - Rev. 2:22
 4. Sardis had a reputation as an active, strong congregation; however, Jesus said that spiritually they were dead. - Rev. 3:1
 - b. Jesus told them to repent and do good works or He would oppose them without warning - Rev. 3:3
 5. Laodicea was serving the Lord indifferently and were materialistic; Jesus told them to repent or He would treat them with revulsion.
 - a. Rev. 3:14-19
 - b. In no case did Jesus allow them to remain in error in perpetuity.
 - c. In every case, they were required to repent and cease the erring practice within a limited period of time, or fellowship would end.
- B. Now if Jesus refused to permit these congregations to continue in fellowship with Him while practicing just one or two errors, then what makes contemporary erring churches of Christ think that He will remain in fellowship with them while they continue practicing unsound doctrine in the work, worship, and organization He ordained for His church?
1. Furthermore, what breakdown in reasoning among professed members of sound churches permits them to assemble and worship with congregations with which Jesus has refused fellowship? Are they somehow wiser or more loving than the Lord?
- C. Jesus cares whether a church is practicing sound doctrine. It is well past time that His followers care, too.
1. 2John 9-11; Eph. 5:6-11

Conclusion:

- A. Jesus has not changed His will for the church - Heb. 13:8
- B. We will follow the pattern He authorized - 2Tim. 1:13
- C. We will not consider changing His plan - 1Cor. 4:6
- D. Sound churches of Christ are separate and distinct from both the denominations of men and from digressive churches. We do not apologize for the truth.