

Sound Doctrine  
1 Timothy 6:3-5  
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A general theme woven throughout Paul's first letter to Timothy is sound doctrine. At least ten times Paul emphasizes soundness of teaching and faithfulness to the doctrine of Christ (1:3, 10; 4:6, 11; 5:7, 21; 6:2-3, 13-14, 17, 20). The apostle reinforces this theme with such phrases as "charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (1:3), "these things command and teach" (4:11), "these things give in charge" (5:7), and "these things teach and exhort" (6:2). In the beginning of the sixth chapter Paul addresses the conduct and attitude of Christian slaves toward their masters. By their conduct, the doctrine of God will either be slandered or defended. Let's note Paul's admonition and see what lessons we can draw from our text.

Sound Doctrine Defended

That none may find occasion to blaspheme the authority and doctrine of God, Christian slaves were to treat their masters with the highest degree of dignity (6:1). Slaves whose masters were also brothers in Christ were not to hold them in contempt but rather as a brother faithful to sound doctrine and beloved of God (6:2). Imagine a man serving as a shepherd over the flock of God and also a master to one of the flock. Consider the circumstances of a man faithfully and forcefully preaching the gospel to the church on the Lord's day only to return home as a slave to a family who are members of the church. Such relationships would certainly be difficult to navigate without the guidance and direction of sound doctrine.

Furthermore, picture how the master would kindly respond, not only to the Christian slave but also to the wholesome words of Jesus Christ, which dictated such a peaceful and unpretentious attitude. Moreover, how greatly impressed would an observing world be, seeing one in such a lowly position standing on equal footing with his master in a life serving God. By following such apostolic admonitions Christian slaves powerfully defend sound doctrine.

Sound Doctrine Defined

Paul defines sound doctrine and draws a line in the sand that exposes the true heart and character of any who would stand in opposition to the doctrine of God: "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3). Here is the line. Here is the bar. Here is the standard to which all men are to conform and by which all men are to be measured.

First, Paul defines sound doctrine as the "wholesome words" of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul uses the same terminology in another letter to Timothy speaking of those who "will not endure sound doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:3), and to Titus speaking both of sound doctrine (Titus 1:9; 2:1) and of those who are "sound in the faith" (Titus 1:13; 2:2). The Greek word translated "wholesome" was used by the ancient Greeks in the sense of one's health either mentally or physically. We find the term in Luke twice of those who are whole or healthy (Luke 5:31; 5:10) and once of the prodigal son who returned "safe and sound" (Luke 15:27). Wholesome does not refer to the spiritual health of the soul but to the words themselves which are healthy or sound. Peter spoke of sound doctrine as "sincere milk" or "spiritual milk which is without guile" (2 Pet. 2:2). David sang of the wholesome words of God that "convert the soul, make wise the simple, rejoice the heart, enlighten the eyes, are more desirable than gold, and are sweeter than honey" (Ps. 19:7-10).

Second, Paul defines sound doctrine as "the doctrine which is according to godliness." The Greek term translated godliness is found fifteen in the New Testament. Paul employs it nine times in his letters to Timothy (1 Tim. 2:2; 3:16; 4:7, 8; 6:3, 5; 6:6, 11; 2 Tim. 3:5). The doctrine that is

“according to godliness” is the doctrine that promotes godliness. That is, the doctrine that promotes reverence and respect toward God.

Finally, it must be emphasized that these words are not limited only to Paul’s admonition regarding Christian slaves. The Greek word translated “teach otherwise” is found in only one other passage of Scripture, which passage serves to bookend this letter to Timothy. “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” (1 Tim 1:3). In the opening of this letter Paul instructs Timothy to charge the saints not to teach contrary to sound doctrine. The apostle then proceeds to note those things which are according to sound doctrine. Then as he draws his letter to a conclusion he points Timothy back to his opening charge to teach only sound doctrine — doctrine that is healthy for the soul and promotes reverence toward God.

#### Sound Doctrine Despised

Paul next reveals the true character of those who despise and refuse to consent to sound doctrine. Blinded by pride they become ignorant of knowledge and spend their time “doting about questions and strifes of words” (6:4). According to Thayer, the word translated doting carries the sense of one who is “sick of any ailment of the mind.” In essence Paul says that one who despises sound doctrine becomes so consumed with debating trivial matters that rather than being sound in the faith (Titus 1:13; 2:2) they become diseased in the mind. They do not “give heed unto the doctrine” that will save them and others (1 Tim. 4:16), but stir up envy and strife which leads to slanderous accusations and hurtful suspicions among brethren.

The apostle further notes that those who despise sound doctrine engage in “perverse disputings” or “wranglings” of men (1 Tim. 6:5). In other words they continually cause irritation and friction among brethren. Such men have become corrupted in their minds and destitute of the truth. How tragic! Those who despise the healthy and wholesome doctrine they once held dear now possess minds that are rotten having defrauded themselves of the truth. So corrupt of mind are those who despise sound doctrine that rather than consent to wholesome words they seek to make a living off of them.

#### Sound Doctrine Distinguished

What is our responsibility to those who despise sound doctrine? Paul makes it clear that we are to withdraw from them (1 Tim. 6:5; cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Thess. 3:16). The withdrawing of our fellowship from those who reject sound doctrine distinguishes us from the world. Paul admonished, “if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thess. 3:14). To the Philippians he wrote, “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example” (Phil. 3:17). Clearly, following after sound doctrine distinguishes from those who refuse to consent to the wholesome words of Christ. Further, our withdrawing fellowship from those who teach other doctrine also serves to distinguish that healthy wholesome doctrine from doctrines that corrupt. One who gives himself to the meditation sound doctrine is easily identified and is a benefit to all with whom he may come into contact (1 Tim. 4:15-16). May we ever strive faithfully to proclaim and persevere in that sound wholesome doctrine that promotes reverence and respect toward God.