

SOUND DOCTRINE

THE Apostle Paul, while awaiting execution in a Roman prison and knowing that the time of his departure was at hand, in his farewell message to Timothy penned this exhortation: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. 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" (II Timothy 4:2-4).

Nineteen centuries have demonstrated that Paul was a true prophet. We can say today that the time has come when they will not endure sound doctrine. In these days of broadmindedness, of free thinking, liberalism and modernism, there is little room for sound doctrine; it has become a despised term.

The religionist of today is ruthlessly discarding those tried teachings of the Bible that once constituted the faith and practice of the church. The Biblical doctrines of the Early Church were revived in the Reformation of Luther's day, preached in the Holiness movement of John Wesley's time, and they have been the inspiration of all true evangelism down through the ages —teachings which have shaken continents and shaped the destiny of nations.

What Is Sound Doctrine?

There is nothing mystical or obscure about the term "sound doctrine." It is that body of teachings in which Jesus instructed His disciples, which they in turn delivered to the Church, and which the Church adopted as its rule of faith and practice, and preached to the world. These teachings, in the main, consisted of a belief in one God, but three Persons in the Godhead — God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The teachings embraced the essential deity and incarnation of the Son in the Person of Jesus Christ — God manifested in the flesh (I Timothy 3:16); His sacrificial death and shed Blood as the only atonement for sin; His physical resurrection and ascension; the fall of man, his sinful depraved state, and his desperate need of salvation found only in the vicarious sacrifice provided upon the Cross; and the necessity of heartfelt repentance and restitution to those we have wronged.

Sound doctrine includes the teaching of three definite experiences: namely, Justification (regeneration, John 3:3); Sanctification (holiness, Hebrews 12:14; 13:12,13); the Baptism of the Holy Ghost (endowment of power for service, Acts 1:4-8). Sound doctrine includes the teaching of the literal second coming of Jesus Christ to establish His millennial kingdom upon earth; of two resurrections (the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust); of the final judgment of the quick and the dead; and an eternal Heaven and a never-ending hell. Jesus also taught healing for the body, and provided for it in the Atonement. He denounced divorce and remarriage. He instituted three ordinances which He commanded His disciples to observe: water baptism by immersion, the Lord's Supper, and the washing of the disciples' feet.

These were the teachings which constituted the framework of early Apostolic Christianity and which produced the godly living and Christian zeal which marked that period. The disciples "went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." No age of the Church has ever surpassed that early standard. When persecutions broke out, men and women suffered imprisonment, endured cruel mockings and scourgings, and some were burned at the stake rather than recant or deny one of the least of the doctrines which they had received. Apostolic Christianity shines out in bold relief on the pages of history against the dark background of the succeeding generations. Sound doctrine was its bulwark.

The Mainspring of Revivals

With the close of the Early Church age, sound doctrine became obscured and almost lost amid the ecclesiastical trappings and theological rubbish of the Dark Ages. But at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Martin Luther, in the face of violent opposition, struggled through to the doctrine of justification by faith. A great revival swept Europe, and the Reformation was launched. Religious liberty was born. The seeds of civil liberty were also sown, out of which have grown our free forms of democratic government, shaping the course of nations down to the present day. That is what the doctrine of justification by faith has done for the world.

Two hundred years later, John Wesley was used of God to restore to the Church the doctrine of entire sanctification, with the result that Christians were fired with a new zeal. The great Holiness revival of the eighteenth century was launched. It swept the British Isles, spread to the countries of Europe, and finally crossed the Atlantic. Countless Christians in America rejoiced in the experience of entire sanctification.

From that time on, numerous revivals have swept America and many foreign lands; and the doctrines that were preached and which stirred multitudes to seek the Lord were those which were preached by the Apostles in the Early Church. But it was not until the year 1906 that the Latter Rain, spoken of by the Prophet Joel, was poured out.

A little band of people who had been sanctified wholly were praying and waiting upon the Lord in a humble place in the city of Los Angeles, when suddenly the power fell "and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance," as on the Day of Pentecost.

At last the great Latter Rain of the Spirit had fallen, and it has been falling ever since. God is ripening the fruit for the harvest; He has restored to the Church not only the baptism of the Holy Ghost, but also the whole body of teachings that constituted the sound doctrine of the Apostolic age.

Founding of the Apostolic Faith Church

The Apostolic Faith Church came into being at the time of the outpouring of the Spirit in 1906, and consisted of those believers who embraced the fundamental teachings as defined above. These teachings became the groundwork of this mighty Latter Rain Gospel which has since been preached at the headquarters of the Apostolic Faith Church in Portland, Oregon, and has radiated into all the earth. We have seen a repetition of those early days when the disciples "went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following," miracles wrought, the sick healed, lives transformed, and people prepared for the coming of the Lord. It has happened because sound doctrine has been steadfastly preached and adhered to.

The Spiritual and Moral Decline

It is this body of fundamental teachings that modern religionists would now discard! Someone has well said, "The doctrines are the framework — the bones of Christianity. And the man who will not endure sound doctrine has a jellyfish religion." No term more perfectly characterizes the spineless religions of this present age than that. The "advanced" teachings of today, some way or another, are not producing the Pauls, the Peters, the Johns, the Luthers, the Wesleys of former generations. There is not much resemblance in the carnally minded, pleasure-loving, self-gratifying modern religionists to that army of early Christian martyrs who died in dungeons and perished at the stake for the faith.

Is it not also significant that parallel with this departure from the old fundamental teachings of the Bible there has been an alarming decline in morals as well as in spirituality? Does the ungodly state of the world today reflect any "advance" in religion? Has anything been gained either spiritually or morally through discarding of these tried teachings of old? The rapid degeneracy of the age and the "jellyfish"

religions of today are the answer to that question. Without sound doctrine there can be no sound Christianity.

The Influx of False Doctrine

The alarming departure from the faith has not halted with the mere discarding of the teachings of the Bible. There has been the added evil of turning to false doctrine. Among the stinging rebukes leveled at Israel in her backslidden state was this one, "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). These "broken cisterns" were the idolatrous worships to which Israel turned after she had forsaken God. When men forsake true religion, their next step is toward false religion — which "can hold no water." "They shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Timothy 4:4). Is not this what has happened in our day? The world is overrun with spurious doctrines, false prophets, counterfeit religions — Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Spiritualism, Seventh Day Adventism, and innumerable fanatical sects.

What is the meaning of this deluge of religions that has swept the earth in recent years? What is the import of all this religious stir in the world. What are we to make of this confusion of cults and creeds, of doctrines and dogmas, of systems and sects that are infesting the earth? It means that we are living in the last days; that the great apostasy foretold in the Word of God is upon us: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (I Timothy 4:1). The occult and Satan worship are deceiving people by the millions.

We are living in fearful days, but these, too, are wonderful days. The Spirit of Truth, which Jesus promised should guide His disciples into all truth, is in the earth seeking out the Bride of Christ — a people who love His Word, who abide in His doctrine, and who are preparing for His coming.

But while the Holy Ghost is thus seeking a Bride for the returning Bridegroom, let it be remembered that another force is at work in the earth. The spirit of antichrist is also in the world preparing a people for his advent: "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (II Thessalonians 2:9,10).

The time is at hand. Ultimately we are going to be found in one of these two camps: either in the ranks of the redeemed, to enter in to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb when Christ comes, or in the forces of the antichrist to undergo the sorrows of the Great Tribulation that is rapidly coming upon the earth. Ought not, then, the terrible flood tide of apostasy that is setting in startle us into wakefulness lest we be caught in its fatal undertow? There is but one safe course; and that is to have the doctrine of Christ laid in the heart through the new birth, to be sanctified wholly, a second, definite work of grace, and to receive the mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost. When one has received these three experiences he will not be easily shaken. The doctrines will then be bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. He will stand when temptations come.