

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Measures of a Sound Church

By Andy Sochor

How can we know if a local church is a sound church? First, what do we mean by a sound church? This particular phrase is not used in the New Testament. But the word “sound” is used to describe teaching, doctrine, and words (1 Tim. 1:10; 2 Tim. 1:13; 4:3). The Greek word which is translated “*sound*” means to have good health, to be well, and to be uncorrupted. This word can certainly be used in reference to a local church. So how do we know if a church is “*sound*”?

It may be good to begin by noticing some things that are not proper indicators of the soundness of a local church.

First, numbers are not always a good gauge for measuring how sound a congregation is. Large churches are often apostate churches. A church may experience growth because they teach what people want to hear rather than what they need to hear. Jesus said there would be a small number that will be saved compared to the large number that will be lost (Matt. 7:13-14). If a church is large and/or growing larger, does that mean it is not sound? Of course not. But it does mean that we cannot assume a congregation is sound based on numbers.

Second, having a popular, well-liked preacher does not make a church sound. In fact, the greater the popularity of the preacher, the more we might wonder why he is so popular. Jesus was so unpopular that He was crucified. Paul explained how futile of an effort it was for a preacher to seek to be popular with people: “*For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ*” (Gal. 1:10). John wrote, “*Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you*” (1 Jn. 3:13). On the other hand, the world loves its own (Jn. 15:19). Certainly, a preacher’s popularity cannot be used as a good measure of a sound church.

Third, having a new, fancy building in which to meet is not a good indicator that a church is sound. All this indicates is that the congregation is large and/or has wealthy members to contribute to the building fund. The place in which a church meets is not important (John 4:21). Therefore, neither the building nor the fact that a congregation might have respected and prominent members of the community are measures of soundness, either (1 Corinthians 1:26).

Furthermore, a church may simply have a reputation of being a sound church. But they could just “*have a name that [they] are alive, but [they] are dead*” (Rev. 3:1). A congregation may have been sound in the past, but can no longer be classified as such (Rev. 2:4-5). How then do we determine whether or not a church is a sound church?

The way we measure whether or not a church is a sound church is if they “*hold fast the pattern of sound words*” (2 Tim. 1:13, NKJV). A sound church will preach the gospel without adding to it, taking away from it, or changing it in any way (1 Tim. 3:15; Gal. 1:6-9). It will not tolerate or receive false teaching (2 Jn. 9-11), but rather will expose and refute error (Titus 1:9-11). A sound church will pattern its assemblies after the New Testament (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 14:15, 40; 16:1-2) and worship “*in spirit and truth*” (Jn. 4:24). It will do the work that God has given it to do (Eph. 3:10; 4:11-16) and be content to stay within the bounds of what has been authorized (Colossians 3:17). A sound church will work to grow spiritually (Eph. 4:16) and numerically, but only insofar as God gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6).

Are you part of a sound church? If not, remember that “*a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough*” (1

Cor. 5:6). Take an objective look at the congregation of which you are a member. Is it following the New Testament pattern or popular opinion? Does the preacher seek to please God or men? Does the teaching build up our faith or our self-esteem and emotions? Does the church do the work God has given it to do or are people drawn there for social and/or carnal reasons? Is the church truly a church of Christ (Rom. 16:16) or does it simply claim to belong to Christ?

We should seek to be part of a sound church. We must measure that not by our own contrived definition of soundness, but by the word of God. – *Plain Bible Teaching*, January 1, 2008. ■



Positive Preaching

By Andy Sochor

Sometimes we hear people describe a sermon preached as either “positive” or “negative.” The word of God does not use these terms to describe preaching. So to get an idea what these descriptors mean, we need to look to modern dictionaries. That which is positive is “marked by or indicating acceptance, approval, or affirmation” (Merriam-Webster). Conversely, “negative” would indicate “denial, prohibition, or refusal” (Merriam-Webster). Upon looking at these definitions, it is no wonder why people generally prefer “positive” preaching.

Again, the terms “positive” and “negative” are never used in the Bible to describe preaching. But by the definitions above, some preaching may fall into one of those categories. Positive preaching would include topics like the love of God, the sacrifice of Christ, the gospel being open to all, unity among believers, and the eternal reward of heaven. In contrast, negative preaching would include the wrath of God, the judgment of Christ, the regulations and doctrines contained in the gospel, withdrawing from unfaithful Christians, and the eternal punishment of hell. Generally, people will prefer the positive teaching because they can feel good about those things. The negative teaching produces sorrow, guilt, and fear.

Can we simply choose to preach only the “positive” and ignore the “negative”? Surely people would like that sort of message more. However, we have an obligation to teach **“the whole counsel of God”** (Acts 20:27, NKJV). Those things listed above that some might consider to be negative are contained in the word of God. Therefore, they are part of the **“whole counsel”** that must be taught. Those who only preach the positive are not serving faithfully as preachers of the gospel.

When the Lord called Jeremiah to proclaim His will, He told him, **“I have put My words in your mouth”** (Jer. 1:9). What was he to do with the words of the Lord? He was to **“pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant”** (Jer. 1:10). According to our definitions, four characteristics of Jeremiah’s message would be negative and only two would be positive. When Paul charged Timothy to **“preach the word,”** he told him to **“reprove, rebuke, exhort”** (2 Tim. 4:2). Two of those are negative and only one positive. Are these verses teaching that two thirds of all preaching should be “negative”? No. Different congregations and individual Christians have different needs. There may be times when they do not need that much “negative” preaching. Other times, they may need more.

What we need to remember is that **“all Scripture is inspired by God”** (2 Tim. 3:16) and that **“every word of God is pure”** (Prov. 30:5). So while man may try and classify some teachings of Scripture as positive and others negative, all of it is from God and **“profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work”** (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Let us learn to ignore the labels man has placed upon the word of God and simply teach **“the whole counsel of God”** (Acts 20:27). Any preaching that does this, whether considered positive or negative by others, is what God expects. And following God instead of the pressures of men is always positive. – *Plain Bible Teaching*, April 1, 2006. ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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