

Soundness and Good Works

Joe Slater

What does Jesus expect of the church? Answering that question from the Scriptures would produce a lengthy list! In summary, though, two things stand out from Paul's letter to Titus: soundness, and good works.

Within this short (three chapters) letter, Paul emphasizes soundness five times. "Sound" means healthy; the Lord wants His church to be spiritually healthy. Elders must use **sound** (healthy) teaching to exhort (comfort) the faithful and to convict those who contradict the truth (Titus 1:9). Accepting false teaching is like eating poison; it will make you ill, or perhaps kill you! Sound doctrine, on the other hand, will promote spiritual health and growth. Paul exhorted Titus to "*speak the things which are proper for **sound** doctrine*" (2:1). By using such "***sound** speech that cannot be condemned,*" Titus would be leading by example and giving the enemies of the gospel no occasion to criticize (2:7, 8).

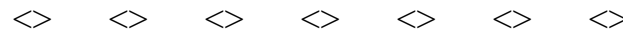
Titus was to rebuke sinful people sharply so that they might be **sound** in the faith (1:13). Sinful behavior detracts from spiritual health, just as physically harmful behavior (smoking, jumping off a cliff) results in physical injury or disease. God wants His church not only to believe the right teaching, but to live consistently with that belief. Older men in particular are to be "***sound** in the faith*" (2:12); that is, in both believing and doing what is right according to the word of God.

Connected to soundness, then, is the doing of good works. Paul sets forth our duty to do good works six times in Titus. He criticizes those who profess to know God, but deny Him through wickedness and a lack of good works (1:16). This was especially troublesome

on the island of Crete, where Titus was, since laziness was a well-known characteristic of the people there (1:12).

Titus was to set the example in doing good works (2:7). Every Christian is obligated to do good works, for one of the reasons Jesus gave Himself for us was that we might be a "*special people, zealous for good works*" (2:14). Therefore, Paul told Titus to "*remind them . . . to be ready for every good work*" (3:1). We should never be nonchalant about good works, but rather "*be careful to maintain good works*" (3:8). Careful does not mean hesitant, but full of concern for the needs of others. Thus Paul says, "*let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful*" (3:14).

The Lord expects soundness and good works from His church. May we strive to accept, teach, and live the truth, doing good works to His glory!



Comparing Up or Down

Today I had a Bible study in the home of a lady without indoor plumbing. During the course of our study, she told me about the charity work that she did with the "poor" out in the villages who live in huts.

This strongly reminded me that when comparing our circumstances we always have two choices. We could compare "up" and feel sorry for ourselves. In this case our spiritual lives will be stunted by envy, bitterness, and discontentment. OR we could compare "down" and feel very fortunate. This can lead us to new spiritual heights as we are motivated to help those who are in greater need than we are.

Which direction are you focusing today?

--Daniel Gaines (missionary in Tanzania)

ONE WAY

Jesus said unto him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

A few days ago, a news story told of a driver going the wrong way on the freeway. You can guess what happened. He hit another driver head-on, and he was killed. Later, the authorities determined that the wrong-way driver was impaired by drug use.

One Way signs are placed on highways and roads for a reason. The driver who ignores them can pay with his life, and he often causes death or injury to innocent people.

Our world is filled with people who do not see the One Way sign in religion. Some who see it think it's not for them, so they choose to ignore it. Others tell fellow travelers of a different way, and they and their followers are lost.

Peter and John were teaching the people about Jesus and the resurrection. They had just healed a man who had been lame from birth. The priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees seized them and threw them in prison. The rulers asked them, "*By what power, or in what name, have you done this?*"

Peter answered boldly, "*In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.*" Then he told them, "*And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven that is given among men, wherein we must be saved*" (Acts 4:10, 12).

Jesus is the One Way, the only way for men to be saved. He is the promised one through whom all the families of the earth are blessed. He is the eternal one, the Alpha and the Omega. He is the only one whom God will accept. Let us follow Jesus.

--Donna Richmond Wittlif (Denver, CO)