**Marks of a Sound Church**

**Introduction**

1. It was the Lord’s will that the organization of His church to be at the local level – no universal organization on earth – simply Christ reigning in heaven.
2. Each congregation is to remain autonomous – **Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2**
   1. They are to operate in submission to the Head – Christ – separate from another local group.
   2. Prevents widespread apostasy – see 7 churches in Asia (2 faithful, 5 warned) (Consider the Catholic church, and the universal organization resulting from, and progressing in further widespread apostasy)
3. It is the function of each local congregation to uphold the truth – **1 Timothy 3:15** – in doctrine and practice.
4. Implication – not all churches of Christ are necessarily right with God.
   1. Local autonomy is the design for the very reason of the knowledge that not all churches will follow the pattern like they should.
   2. Requires congregational introspection, and constant accountability to make sure we are remaining true to God’s word, regardless of what others are doing.
5. We often speak of differences:
   1. Denominations/Lord’s church – obvious.
   2. Liberal/conservative – still obvious (EX: institutionalism, instrumental music, social gospel, fellowship halls, etc.)
   3. Even among those who are churches of Christ but are not institutional/liberal – unsound/sound (a more scriptural concept).
6. What does a “sound” church look like?
7. What is a “sound” church?
8. Sound – *hygiainō*
   1. to have sound health, i.e. be well (in body); figuratively, to be uncorrupt (true in doctrine) (STRONG)
   2. (1) to be in good physical health, be healthy, (2) to be sound or free from error, be correct (BDAG)
   3. Of Gaius – **3 John 1-4**
      1. “health” *– hygiainō* – used for physical health.
      2. ***“just as your soul prospers – (v. 3)*** – explains how.
9. Sound Church
   1. A sound church:
      1. Is uncorrupt, true in doctrine.
      2. Is free from error, correct.
      3. Has truth abiding, walks in truth.
   2. Sound: Philadelphia – **Revelation 3:7-8, 10** – kept word/command.
   3. Unsound: Corinth – **1 Corinthians 4:14-21** – many problems, Paul will come with rod of discipline/correction if they don’t change.
      1. Not institutional/liberal like we might be familiar with.
      2. However, unsound.
10. The Bible gives us some clear marks of a sound church.
11. What are marks of a sound church?
12. Distinctive Preaching
    1. **1 Timothy 3:14-15** – church’s soundness (health) is a representation of their relationship to the truth.
    2. At the core of a congregation’s spiritual health is the teaching they request, receive, and follow:
       1. **Ephesians 4:11-12** – gifts for edification (the major work of the church)
       2. If the teaching is not true to God’s word, then there is the opposite of edification – **Titus 2:1** – instruction to Titus
    3. Distinctive:
       1. **1 Corinthians 14:6-12** – concerning the use of tongue speaking in ways leading to edification (interpreter present).
          1. **(vv. 7-8)** – distinctive sounds – gathering of an assembly, sound for battle, etc.
          2. **(vv. 9-11)** – understanding, significance, foreigner (not on the same page).
       2. **Nehemiah 8:8** – gave sense, helped understand – **(v. 9)** – made known what it meant to them – application.
       3. EXAMPLE:
          1. Authority – more than simply “we must obey God” – work, worship, organization of church – Why vs why we do not do certain things – past issues, etc.
          2. Morality – more than simply “we need to follow Jesus, and be pure” – modesty, sexual immorality, MDR, social drinking, etc.
          3. Home – more than simply “we need to have loving homes” – God ordained roles, discipline, etc.
    4. Preaching that is whole – **Acts 20:25-27**
       1. Reason he was free from guilt:
          1. NOT – He didn’t preach anything wrong; He didn’t offend; everyone liked him.
          2. BUT – He preached all of God’s word – didn’t spare them of any truth, whether it hurt or not.
       2. Problem is not always what is being preached (error), but what is NOT being preached (whole counsel) – **Deuteronomy 4:2; 29:29** (if revealed, we must speak and do)
    5. Must be desired/demanded – **2 Timothy 4:1-5** – if a church stops demanding sound preaching the church will slouch toward unsoundness/apostasy.
13. Strong Leadership
    1. **Acts 14:21-23** – turned back to strengthen with encouragement, and by appointing elders.
    2. **Titus 1:5** – no elders = lacking. (Perhaps not unscriptural, or rebellious, but not to the spiritual health/strength God would desire)
       1. Scripturally organized; Scripturally unorganized
       2. Unscripturally organized; Unscripturally unorganized
    3. Elders – **1 Peter 5:2-4** – feed, oversee, example.
       1. **Hebrews 13:17** – watch out for souls – authority. (Not above Chief Shepherd)
       2. Elders are a vital component to a local congregation’s spiritual well-being.
    4. When elders are not present:
       1. Nothing to fill that void – no official position of authority.
       2. Men’s business meetings – do not fill the role of elders in a congregation without qualified men – expedient to evaluate state of the congregation and come to necessary decisions in carrying out her work.
    5. Much needed:
       1. Personal accountability – **2 Corinthians 13:5**
          1. Wisdom in God’s plan of elders.
          2. Not all will fulfill such responsibility – elders watch out for souls.
       2. Congregational accountability – **Hebrews 3:13**
       3. Collective stand against worldliness/sin – **Ephesians 5:8-13** – have no fellowship, expose, shameful to even speak much less have among you. (0 tolerance)
       4. Collective stand against error – **Romans 16:17-20** – simple concerning evil. (0 tolerance)
       5. Aspiration for an eldership – not optional but required according to the pattern – requires effort in teaching, helping growing individuals.
14. Faithful Members
    1. **Romans 12:4-5** – individual members contribute to the soundness or unsoundness of a congregation.
       1. Chain is only as strong as its weakest link.
       2. NOT that one weak member makes the congregation unsound, but necessary for each to take responsibility and live faithfully.
    2. NOT SIMPLY FAITHFUL IN ATTENDANCE – **Hebrews 10:25** – important, but not everything.
    3. Things proper for sound doctrine – **Titus 2** (Older men, Older women, Younger women, Younger men, bondservants)
       1. NOTE: **(v. 1)** – results from sound preaching/teaching.
       2. Older men – **(v. 2)**
       3. Older women – **(v. 3)**
       4. Younger women – **(vv. 4-5)**
       5. Younger men – **(vv. 6-8)**
       6. Bondservants – **(vv. 9-10)**
       7. Overall lives dedicated to living for God – not 4 hour Christians (Sunday and Wednesday services), but truly/sincerely serving God – (**vv. 11-15**)
          1. **(v. 15)** – Titus, a young man, had the responsibility, and authority, to speak these things boldly.
          2. Sound preaching not just about matters pertaining to church as a whole, but individuals.
          3. **Romans 12:1-2** – members not conforming to the world, but being transformed.
    4. Active in the congregation – **Ephesians 4:16** – every joint supplies. (Doing what you are authorized, and what you are able.)
15. The Practice of Discipline
    1. If a church’s soundness depends on sound preaching/teaching, and the application of such then there is by implication the necessity of enforcing such teaching and correcting those members who go astray from it.
    2. Discipline:
       1. “(3) training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character” (Merriam-Webster)
       2. “the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior, using punishment to correct disobedience” (New Oxford American Dictionary)
       3. Both the idea of teaching/instruction to mold, correction, and punishment of disobedience – with the objective of correction.
       4. Paideia – tutorage, i.e. education or training; by implication, disciplinary correction (STRONG)
          1. 2) whatever in adults also cultivates the soul, especially by correcting mistakes and curbing passions.
             1. 2a) instruction which aims at increasing virtue
             2. 2b) chastisement, chastening, (of the evils with which God visits men for their amendment) (THAYER)
          2. Instruction, enforcement of instruction, correction of error/rebellion/disobedience.
    3. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** – the profitability of scripture describes disciplinary structure.
       1. Teaching pointless if no reproof (conviction of wrong).
       2. Reproof pointless if no correction.
       3. Correction pointless if no persistence in further righteous instruction.
       4. Instruction in righteousness pointless if not enforced.
    4. Discipline implies lacking tolerance for sin – if sin is not repented of when reproof and correction are given it is still not to be tolerated.
       1. **1 Thessalonians 5:14** – warning the unruly.
       2. **2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15** – withdrawing from the disorderly.
       3. To save the soul – **1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20**
       4. To keep the church pure – **1 Corinthians 5:6-8**
    5. NOTE: Every congregation, even those which are sound, will have problems of sin arise. ONE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SOUND CHURCH AND AN UNSOUND CHURCH IS THE INTENTION TO DEAL WITH SIN WHEN IT ARISES.

**Conclusion**

1. Not every congregation is sound.
2. We must understand what a “sound” congregation is.
3. These marks of a sound church described in scripture must be sought out and applied.
4. Our measure is not other congregations – **2 Corinthians 10:12** – but Christ – **Ephesians 4:13**