

Sound Doctrine and Specific Duties

Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, “I spend half of my time telling Christians to study doctrine, and the other half telling them doctrine is not enough.” This advice seems wise in light of Titus 2:1, which indicates the great need for sound doctrine, but also that there is the necessity for more, for teaching that accords with sound doctrine.

This statement telling Titus he is to teach what accords with sound doctrine, is introduced by the words, “But as for you”. The conjunction ‘but’ connects what is being said here with what has just been said. At the end of Titus 1, Paul speaks about false teachers whose minds and consciences were defiled and who taught what ought not to be taught. As chapter 2 begins he is saying, but you Titus, are to be totally different from these empty talkers who are unfit for any good work.

The statement which follows, “teach what accords with sound doctrine” suggests that sound doctrine is to be taught, and says that what accords with or fits with sound doctrine is to be taught. John Stott said this about the statement, “this compressed phrase indicates that two strands are to be woven together in Titus’ teaching.” These two threads could be called gospel doctrine and gospel duties. Titus, like all Christian teachers, is to teach specific gospel duties based on sound gospel doctrine.

After Paul’s exhortation for him to do this in Titus 2:1, in 2:2-10 we have Paul’s instruction on how to do this. Paul shows Titus what specific gospel duties are to be emphasized among those who believe based on age, sex and status. Those who believe gospel doctrine, as summarized in 2:11-14, need instructions regarding the implications of the gospel particularly relevant to these different groups.

The first group Titus received particular instruction about is the older men. Older men should be challenged to be “sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.” What are the tendencies and temptations that older men face that necessitate these directives? Chrysostom, an early Church Father, said, “There are some failings which age has, that youth has not...it (age) has a slowness, a timidity, a forgetfulness, an insensibility, and an irritability.”

The first three qualities mentioned seem to fit together and be similar. Both sober-minded and self-controlled involve restraint, and both are a characteristic of dignity. A man worthy of respect will be characterized by such restraint. Older men seem to have a tendency to become unrestrained in ways that are undignified. They are tempted to become grumpy, cynical, argumentative and rude. Many seem to begin to adopt the attitude that says, “I have the right to say and do whatever I want to, however I want to.” These three qualities seem to shout ‘no’ to this mentality saying instead, “Don’t retire from the restraint that is a characteristic of dignity.”

The next three qualities given are also connected by the word ‘sound’. Older men are to be sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness. ‘Sound’ means healthy, wholesome or mature. As men age there is the need for steadfastness or endurance. One might be tempted to slack off when it comes to running the race characterized by faith and love. Paul said “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way...only let us hold true to what we have attained.” Here Paul is urging the older men to have the same mentality, one that is evidence of maturity. He is saying to older men, “Don’t retire from the pursuit that is a characteristic of maturity.” Older men are to hold on to what they have attained and press on to what they haven’t attained in the pursuit motivated by healthy and mature faith and love.