

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

Johnny L. Sanders, D.Min.

SUBJECT: SOUND DOCTRINE
TITLE: AT HOME IN THE HEART
TEXT: 1 JOHN 2:24-29

INTRODUCTION. Theology is the study of God, and though theologians use the term on a regular basis, it is not a term the average person uses every day. The word “doctrine” may be less intimidating to some people, but one seldom hears the average person going around talking about “sound doctrine.” We might substitute the word “Gospel,” but to the average Christian the word may suggest an evangelistic message about Jesus - and very little more. It is indeed that, but John here is talking about the sound doctrine that the believer should learn and permit the Holy Spirit to store in his spirit for daily use.

So what word would we use to emphasize to new believers the importance of sound doctrine? We may use the word “truth” to emphasize sound doctrine, but in a day when so many who profess to be believers look to the church to make them feel good about themselves, and Sunday School as a place for fellowship, I am not sure many people desire anything beyond the basics. Many Christians soak up every thing they can find on the Trinity Broadcasting Network, and while they may carry some sound programing, when I have flipped through the channels I have found a lot that would confuse the average person.

The “me” people are concerned about what they are going to get out of the Christian experience. They will change church, or denominations at the drop of a hat. All they have to hear is that the music down the road is a little more exciting. They think of prayer simply as a way of getting something out of God, not in terms of what God is getting out of them. Many are looking for something that will make them feel good about themselves and speed them on their way to the Cracker Barrel, and then to the movie, and then to the mall, and home to watch a movie on TV. Don’t expect those people back on Sunday evening!

What are we to do? Most preachers know what popular preaching is, and there must be a temptation to give the people what they want - and if the preacher is more concerned with nickels and noses than feeding the sheep, he may well try to give them what they want. However, Paul challenges the preacher to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, **exhort, with great patience and instruction**” (2 Tim. 4:2, NAS). The KJV has “doctrine,” while the NKJV has “teaching.”

Let me confess something. When I was young in the ministry I was asked to preach a revival for a friend who was a little more experienced than I. Sunday morning and each evening I tried to be a little more dynamic than when I was in regular services at the church where I was pastor. I was still

committed to preaching sound biblical messages. However, when I spoke at the early morning service my voice was not yet awake, and I had to - let's say I had to adjust the volume and delivery. After a couple of morning services, my old roommate from seminary said, "Johnny, your delivery in the morning service is much more natural, and it is more effective." I will always be in his debt. That took courage, integrity, and a sincere concern for my ministry. Also, I believe the Lord put it on his heart to tell me that.

After prayerful consideration, I concluded that God did not call me to entertain the sheep. He did not call me to traumatize the sheep. Nor, did He call me to psycho-analyze the sheep. He called me to feed His sheep. This demands a lot of study and preparation. It also demands a lot more expository preaching than topical preaching. There is a place for topical sermons, but we need to be sure the Holy Spirit is the One Who is leading us to prepare and preach the message. I prepared a topical sermon when I was young in the ministry around Paul's use of athletic terms and metaphors - after all, the Olympic games were on television every day at the time. That seemed like a good idea. What I did not know was that a pastor search committee would show up for the service. They filed out, spoke to me and departed, never to be heard from again.

I well remember when people would apologize for pastor who sought to honor Paul's instructions to "exhort with much patience and instructions." I don't know how many times I heard someone apologetically comment on his or her pastor, "He ain't much of a preacher, but he is a good teacher." Sensational sermons get an immediate response. Doctrinal sermons produce more lasting results. However, the preacher may have to wait for years to see the results in his people.

Let me emphasize one thing - expository preaching should be interesting. Doctrinal preaching must not be dry and boring. We are proclaiming the greatest message the world has ever heard - God forbid that we should present it in dry, dull manner. Our passage today stresses the importance of sound doctrine. Two steps are absolutely essential. We must first hear, or learn sound doctrine, and then it must be stored in our spirit for daily use.

I. LET SOUND DOCTRINE "ABIDE IN YOU," 2:24-27.

A. This Verse Offers a Contrast Between True Believers and Those Who Deny Christ, 2:24.

"Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father."

1. Antichrists and liars deny the Father and the Son (2:22f).
2. But you (true believers) should abide in sound doctrine.
 - a. The NAS shows the contrast with the words, "As for you."
 - b. They had been taught sound doctrine from the beginning.

Can you imagine any church ever having better instructions than this church had received from Paul, its founder; from Timothy; and for many years, John the Beloved Disciple? A friend told me they had invited a lay renewal team to lead a service in their church. He told me he was disturbed by some of the things he had heard in the service. Then when he walked out into the parking lot he saw a fellow member, a man was always very quiet and reserved. As he walked toward his friend he was surprised to see the man shaking his head in an agitated manner. He said, "If there had been a lots person in that service there is not way he would know how to be saved!"

I have watched a few televangelists over the years who really concerned me. One bounces and prances all over the auditorium, at one moment shouting condemnation and damnation to the top of his voice, and the next he is leading the packed house in a giggling session. And what about the televangelist whose wife gathered information about people who were standing in line, and then transmitted that information to her husband as he began his healing sessions: "God has given me 'a word of knowledge.' There is a man here from a little town in Mississippi. I believe it is Sledge. This man has suffered for years with crippling arthritis. His brother pushed him in here in a wheel chair. He is seated on the front row." Immediately, he springs down the steps and with the help of assistants, helps the man to stand. They he declares him healed. A television crew intercepted the message from the wife to the televangelist.

Perhaps you saw the O'Reilly Factor recently when Bill O'Reilly announced that Benny Hinn had announced that the Lord had told him to raise forty million dollars to build a healing center. However, after he finished his three million dollar home and a multi-million dollar office building he announced that the Lord had changed his mind (according to O'Reilly).

When I became pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church, Nederland, Texas in the early seventies, I discovered that my predecessor, George Clark, had left to edit the Church Administration Magazine for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board (now LifeWay Christian Resources). Members told me that George sensed that his call was the edification of the saints. George's predecessor had resigned to teach Bible in a Baptist university. Manley Beasley had been pastor a number of years before I moved there and his sister, who handled his scheduling, was an active member. It was obvious to me that these people had been led by some pastors who had an understanding of their calling.

Once again, the preacher of the Word of God must have a high view of his calling. Dr. I. H. Barrett of Clarksdale, Mississippi, was one of the country's earliest allergists, and my first allergist. On my first visit Dr. Barrett explained why he was still practicing in his late seventies. He couldn't interest any young doctors in the Memphis area to specialize in his field at the time, and his commitment to his patients was a deep and sincere one. He leaned forward and said, "I consider mine a high calling - but it is not as high as yours." The preacher of the Gospel who does not see his as a high calling may not last too long in the ministry, or he may just hang on and focus on something else, like counseling, which is an important part of his ministry, but one that should never distract him from his higher call. He must focus on preaching the Word.

Stephen Olford has often declared that there is a famine in America, but it is not a famine of food; it is a famine of expository preaching. What he is saying is that too many people are not being taught sound doctrine. Their pastor may have lost the sense of a high calling, a calling that should leave him humbled, not proud. There is nothing more disgusting than a proud, arrogant preacher; nothing more moving than a humble servant of the Lord. I met Stephen Olford in 1978 when we both received our graduate degree from Luther Rice Seminary. Spiros Zodhiates was sitting by Stephen Olford (they received the Doctor of Theology degree, the rest of us the Doctor of Ministry degree). Many from that class, including Dr. Fred Lowrey and Dr. Larry Lewis, went on to become leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention. Lewis was President of the North American Mission Board. I enjoyed meeting a lot of committed preachers during the week of meetings prior to graduation, but when I visited with Stephen Olford I had an impression I will never forget. As we talked, I became more and more aware of the fact that I was standing in the presence of a man of great humility and meekness - and a man of great power in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Every preacher of the Gospel must have a high sense of his calling. And every church member needs to have a high sense of his pastor's calling. When I began my ministry, most active church members had that view of pastors. Mothers prayed that their little girls might grow up and marry a preacher. Within a generation, that was the last thing mothers wanted. When I began my ministry, I had never heard of a church that had fired its pastor; now it is happening at an alarming rate. When I began my ministry Christians often quoted their pastor; today if someone quotes his pastor it may well be to repeat a joke he told.

Regardless of the preaching style, volume, or personality of the speaker, every preacher should consciously teach people the Word of God under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, every listener needs to understand that he or she is listening to a man of God, called to preach the Word of God; which places that listener under a divine obligation to pray for the one who is preaching the Word, to listen and learn, and to make an application of the message under the leadership - and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

B. What You Hear Should Abide in You.

1. What they had heard was what their preachers had preached and teachers had taught.
2. When the preacher was preaching they should listen and learn sound doctrine.
 - a. Without a doubt, some of them were listening.
 - b. Some of them probably were not listening.

“If what you heard” is a condition of the third class, you may or you may not - you may let the Gospel abide in your heart, or you may not. The subjunctive mood shows potential. The results are based upon your willingness to receive the Word and permit the Holy Spirit to illuminate your heart that you might understand it, and guide you that you might make an application of it. If you are willing, the Gospel will keep on being in your heart, and you will keep on abiding in the Word.

3. When the Gospel is preached today, people should be listening and learning.

Jesus speaks to our hearts when we hear the Gospel preached. Please do not ever let anyone sell you on a low view of preaching. If the Holy Spirit leads in the preparation of a sermon, and if He is anointing the preacher when he is delivering the message, then Jesus will speak to hearts, and He will speak uniquely when the Gospel is preached. When Paul wrote, “So then, **faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God**” (Rom 10:17), the context has to do with the preaching of the Word. This does not minimize Bible reading or Bible study, but it establishes a very high view of preaching. When the Gospel is preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus will affirm that message in the hearts of believers. Sadly, the modern church often does not hold either preaching or preachers in a very high regard. But the Bible does, and there is a need to get back to Scriptural truth.

That means that the preacher must have a high view of preaching, and never preach except under a divine anointing to preach the Word. It also means that those who hear him should do so with hearts prepared by the Holy Spirit to hear the word in humility. When that happens. The Holy Spirit will store what he hears in his heart for future use. Then the Holy Spirit can bring it into his conscious mind when he needs to make certain decisions. The place to begin building respect for pastors and others who preach the Gospel is in the home. There was a lot that was good in the emphasis on the ministry of the laity during the last quarter of the Twentieth Century. There was also a down-side, and that was a loss of respect for pastors. This is not of God, and anyone who is guilty needs to repent.

C. If the Word Abides in You, You Will Abide in the Word.

1. There is a very important message for us here.

- a. You can hear the Gospel preached, and you can learn from hearing.
- b. You are in charge of the listening and learning part.
- c. The Holy Spirit is in charge of the abiding part.
- d. You either hear or read and you learn on one level.
- e. What you learn in you mind, the Holy Spirit will store in your spirit.
- f. What He stores in your spirit, He will “recall” as you need it.

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (John 14:26).

- g. When you need to make decisions, the Holy Spirit will call to mind Scripture you need to make those decisions.

In order for you to recall the Word you must have heard it or read it and the Holy Spirit, Who

inspired ever word of it, must miraculously store sound doctrine - Gospel truth - in your spirit (in your heart) for your edification and guidance. This is true spirituality. I am sorry, folks, but true spirituality does not have as much to do with how high you jump as it does with how straight you walk when you come down.

II. GOD'S ANOINTING ABIDES IN THE HEARTS OF BELIEVERS, 2:25-27.

A. And This Is the Promise That He Has Promised Us; Eternal Life 2:25.

If this verse seems not to be a part of this context, think again. Every person who receives Jesus Christ by grace through faith receives eternal life. Jesus said, "I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish" (John 10:28). Your eternal salvation rests in the promise of our Lord. I am as secure in Him as His promise of eternal life. Furthermore, the promise of eternal life is the answer to critics of the faith, atheists, agnostics, and false teachers who profess faith in Jesus Christ. This was the first line of defense against Gnosticism, as it is the first line of defense against cults and paganism today.

When in doubt about your salvation, remember the promise. When you are assaulted on all sides by the forces of the devil, remember the promise. When you are confused by false teachers, remember the promise. When others propagate a false religion and try to convert you, remember the promise.

B. "These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you" 2:26.

1. "These things" are the words of this epistle.
2. "These things" denote sound doctrine.
3. "These things" include the promise of eternal life.

C. The Lord Places His Spirit in You.

"But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him" (2:27).

1. This is the "indwelling" of (by) the Holy Spirit.
2. Those who are indwelt need to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit.

D. You Do Not Need Anyone to Teach You.

1. This seems to contradict clear teaching about teaching and exhortation.

2. It seems to fly in the face of the hearing and learning of verse 24.
3. When there seems to be a contradiction we need to dig a little deeper.

Ryrie, in his Study Bible Notes says that “The Spirit whom they had received would teach them how to distinguish truth from error (John 16:13).” He adds, “The Spirit may use human teachers to accomplish this (Eph. 4:11-14).” Both points are worthy of our attention. However, the emphasis is on the ministry of the Holy Spirit in helping the Christian distinguish between sound doctrine and false teaching. No matter how brilliant or gifted a teacher may be, only the Holy Spirit can affirm within your heart whether what you are hearing is Scriptural truth.

The Holy Spirit will enable you to distinguish between Christianity and Islam. The Holy Spirit will enable you distinguish between the Jesus of God’s inerrant Word, and the Jesus of Mormonism or any of the New Age movements. The Holy Spirit will help you distinguish between the true Word of God and a corrupted copy like that of the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

III. THOSE WHO ABIDE IN CHRIST WILL NOT BE ASHAMED AT HIS COMING, 2:28-29.

A. God’s Children Are Admonished to Abide in Christ, 2:28.

1. You will look to the Lord’s return with confidence.
 - a. This does not mean if He returns.
 - b. It means when He returns.
 - c. “That when” means that the time of His return is uncertain.
2. Those who are abiding in Christ will not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

B. The Righteousness of Jesus Christ May Be Imputed to Individuals 2:29.

1. We need to know that He is righteous.

This is the condition of the third class - you may know this or you may not. God would have you know it, and you will know it if you humble yourself before Him and let His Holy Spirit nurture and develop you. Sadly, many professing Christians seem to place little emphasis on the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This attitude is not only sinful, it is costly.

2. “Everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him,” (2:29).

“If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him” (NAS).

You may know this, or you may not - but if you do know that He is righteous, you will also know

that everyone who practices righteousness is a born-again believer in Jesus Christ. The only righteousness that is acceptable to God the Father is the righteousness of Jesus Christ which is imputed to those who place their faith and trust in Him. God demands righteousness of everyone who would stand in His presence, but no one can produce it on his own. His highest attempt is as filthy rags; it is repugnant to God. Then, how do we receive righteousness if we cannot produce it? It is imputed by the grace of God unto all who place their faith in His Son.

There is one other thing that must be stressed here. We are not saved by practicing righteousness - by doing righteous deeds. The practice of righteousness is the proof of our salvation, not the grounds for it. We do not get to be saved by doing good works, but if we are in Christ, we should be practicing righteousness. But how can we practice righteousness if we cannot produce any? We practice the righteousness of Jesus Christ which is imputed unto us when we believe in Him. The righteousness we practice is not human righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ, and that righteousness can only be produced in us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION. If the Word of God “abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.” If you abide in the Son and in the Father, the Holy Spirit will produce righteousness in and through you. Practicing righteousness is a matter of grace. The emphasis here is upon our being righteous. The practice of righteousness flows out of our relationship with Jesus Christ. We are saved by grace and we live by grace. The grace of God is the basis for all growth and maturity for every believer.

INVITATION. Is the Word of God abiding in your heart? Are you abiding in the Father and the Son? Can you honestly say that you are “practicing righteousness”? Every believer has that potential. Trust Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit will produce righteousness in and through you. It is by grace that we are saved, not through any merit of our own. And it is by grace that we live in righteousness, not through any merit of our own. If anyone here has never received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, you can only receive if you will simply place your faith in Him. If you know Jesus Christ as Savior, have you crowned Him as Lord in your life? Today is the day of salvation and this is the acceptable time.