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A Sound Church

How do you define a *sound* local church? What determines a congregation's *soundness*? Often we hear the words *sound* and *unsound* used to identify a local church based upon their stance regarding two particular questions — namely, their use of the congregation's treasury and their relationships with other local churches. Certainly those issues affect *soundness*, and must not be minimized in any way, but are those the sole determining factors?

Sound is defined in the *New Oxford American Dictionary* thus: “in good condition; not damaged, injured, or diseased.” It is certainly possible to be in good condition in one aspect and be damaged, injured, or diseased in another. For example, a person can have a “sound mind,” while at the same time declining in bodily health; or be of “sound body,” but mentally or emotionally diseased. An automobile might be “mechanically sound,” but its exterior eaten away by rust or its interior crumbling. Similarly, a local church might be “sound” on the aforementioned doctrinal issues, but plagued by other serious problems. **Congregational soundness** must be viewed comprehensively, considering all aspects (tangible and intangible) of a local church's health.

Consider the inspired praise of the church in Thessalonica: “*For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy*” (1 Thessalonians 2.19-20). On what bases would the Holy Spirit offer such commendation? When we read the description of this local church in the preceding text (1 Thessalonians 1-2), we find a congregation characterized by...

- Sound Bible teaching. (1.5; 2.1-7; cf. Acts 17.2)
- Exemplary leadership. (1.5; 2.8-12)
- Godly conduct. (1.6, 7, 9; 2.13-14; 4.1; cf. Acts 17.5-9)
- Healthy atmosphere. (1.6, 9, 3; 4.9-10; 5.11)
- Evangelistic fervor. (1.8; cf. Matthew 9.36)
- Faithful service. (1.3, 9)
- Spiritual hope. (1.3, 10; cf. Philippians 3.14, 20-21)

Again, *sound doctrine* is vitally important (1 Timothy 4.6; 6.3; 2 Timothy 4.3; Titus 1.9; 2.1), but it is only one aspect of congregational soundness. In other words, it is possible to *teach* all of the right things, and even collectively *do* all of the right things regarding select issues, but still be *unsound*. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15.58).

~jeremy paschall