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# WEST VALLEY CHURCH OF CHRIST

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9:30 am Bible Class—all ages  
10:30 am Sunday Worship  
5:00 pm Proverbs study (online)  
7:00 pm Wednesday Bible Class

Phone Number: (623) 695-5623  
Website: [www.wvcochrist.com](http://www.wvcochrist.com)  
Email: [wvchurchofchrist@gmail.com](mailto:wvchurchofchrist@gmail.com)  
Facebook: West Valley church of Christ

**January 30, 2022**

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## Sounding Out Soundness

Though I'm sure I heard the word used this way earlier, the first time I remember really taking note of the biblical word "sound" as a term meaning something other than noise was in preaching school. I know the term was properly explained there by my teachers, so I don't fault them for the fact that I took the term on board without really understanding what it meant. The word at that time seemed to me to refer basically only to two things: preachers and congregations. Further, it focused on describing them in basically one area—their faithfulness in teaching. To be sound in my earliest understanding of the term was to teach faithfully, and to extend fellowship only to those who taught and tolerated nothing but faithful teaching. My idea at the time was not totally incorrect, but it was definitely incomplete. An experience I had helped my understanding of the concept to grow.

Years ago, I was traveling in the western United States. In my first local work, our congregation received an unsolicited newsletter from a congregation out west. It had all the hallmarks of soundness as I understood it at the time: it defended the concept of restoration, discussed the dangers of false teaching, and spoke faithfully on any subject it covered. I determined while visiting out west to stop at this congregation based on what I had seen in the newsletter, even though I didn't know them and they didn't know me. I have to say, it was one of the best visits that I have ever had! I was greeted warmly by the brethren the Sunday morning I visited and was taken out to lunch after services. After getting to know me, they asked me to preach that evening for their PM service. I was provided dinner that evening and even given a place to stay for the night with one of the families there.

The following Wednesday night, I visited another congregation in a neighboring state. I was not greeted warmly at all; in fact, I was approached by no one before Bible class. I said hello to a few people and was treated to a few gruff "hello's" in response. After Bible class, I initiated a conversation with the preacher who possibly would have never said anything to me had I not bothered. I told him that I was visiting some of the sights out west, and in describing my travels I mentioned the church I had visited the Sunday before. At that point, to put it biblically, his countenance fell. "You know about the preacher there, right?" the man said in a very serious tone. I said no, and the man proceeded to tell me how his life and teaching openly contradicted Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19:9. I was shocked, and said, "You must have him confused with another person." The preacher denied that, and I told him I would look into it.

As we parted ways, he said, "Where are you staying tonight?" I told him I was staying in the backseat of my car (something I did on several occasions as a bachelor). He said, "Well, I've done that plenty of times!" He shook my hand, but I can still remember how he shoved my hand away as the handshake ended. I can't remember anyone else talking to me. On the whole, I can't say that I have had a more cold or unfriendly response as a visitor to a congregation.

I did in fact contact that preacher and found out that sadly what was said about him was true; my subsequent appeals fell on deaf ears. This of course brought my understanding of "soundness" to a crossroad. On the one hand, the congregation that had practiced Biblical hospitality and brotherly love had a preacher who openly contradicted something Jesus taught (he said the church knew and agreed with him). On the other hand, the congregation that believed and taught the truth on that point had not practiced hospitality nor shown brotherly love. They had not even shown evangelistic zeal; no one even bothered to ask my name, let alone if I was a Christian. With my old understanding, the first congregation would have been "unsound" and the second congregation would have been "sound." Could that really be right?

In their own way, both congregations helped me see something more about soundness. The first congregation helped me to see that soundness has to be total in order for it true; we have to do our best to "observe all things" that Jesus commands us (Matthew 28:20). The second congregation taught me that soundness of practice is just as important of soundness of teaching.

The simple definition of "sound" is healthy. I'm sure I was given that definition in preaching school, but it just didn't sink in until I'd had a few experiences. Yes, the word sound is often used to describe doctrine, a word which means teaching. It therefore demands that we teach the truth and stand against those who don't. However, the word sound means more; it is used to describe our stance in the faith (Titus 1:13; 2:2), our mind (2 Timothy 1:7), and our speech (Titus 2:8). Sound doctrine (teaching) incorporates our behavior (1 Timothy 1:9-11). Not surprisingly, the two words translated as "sound" in many translations in this sense are also translated as "whole"—complete, without fault, defect, or illness.

May we strive to cultivate a Christianity that is sound holistically—healthy in belief, in teaching, and in practice—and to use the term properly.