

Fact Sheet for **“Things That Became Sound Doctrine”**
1 Timothy 6:3-10

Pastor Bob Singer
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In verse 6 we encounter the word “doctrine”. This word reminds me of a systematic theology, like Wayne Grudem’s. But when you read the word “doctrine” in 1 Timothy, and if you let your thoughts go to a theology book like this, you will be led off into the weeds and not be able to understand this passage like Paul meant it.

I was asked this week, “Why didn’t God have the Bible arranged in order, like a systematic theology?” Immediately I came back with two answers. 1 – The Bible was written by over 40 different men. *And I could have added “over a 1,500 year period.”* But my second answer was more to the point. 2 – A systematic theology is all about what we believe. It is not about how to apply it to everyday life. The Bible, on the other hand, is both about God’s truth and the application of that truth to us. The word “doctrine” in 1 Timothy needs to be understood the way Paul used it... referring to both truth and the real application of that truth to life.

To understand this word in 1 Timothy 6:3 you need to look at two things. First, do a word study and look at the meaning of “doctrine”. Then look at the context of Paul’s whole letter to Timothy.

First, the ESV rendering “teaches a different doctrine” actually translates one word in the original. That word literally means “teaches something different”. This word refers to more than just an academic theology. It refers to the whole of what Paul taught in contrast to what some others were teaching. Let me flesh this out. Verse 3 could easily be translated, “If anyone teaches something different and does not agree with the sound (or healthy) words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness...” Notice Paul’s emphasis on godliness? This points to the application of sound doctrine or sound teaching to life. Understanding the verse this way will start you on the right path.

Then secondly, take a look at the context of the whole book. Paul used the same word for “doctrine” in 1:3. He followed this up with verse five with terms that speak of life choices based on what God desires. This is what Paul meant by sound doctrine. This is what he taught. Then look at the next verses (6-11). You can imagine the theological discussions that these “certain persons” instigated. You can imagine them saying, “You’ve got to obey the Law of Moses to be right before God!” Their teaching wasn’t about getting the profane to stop being profane, or the sexually immoral to stop being immoral. It was about getting Christians to come under all of the demands of the Mosaic Law. Now think about systematic theologies. You typically do not find words like “ungodly, murderer, immoral, enslaver, and liar” in a systematic theology. But Paul wrote that these things, and things like them, were contrary to “sound doctrine”, literally “sound or healthy teaching”. And if you continue reading through Paul’s letter to Timothy with this mindset you will see many, many references to godliness. This is exactly why Paul gave all those qualifications for overseers and deacons in chapter 3. Those character qualities are sound doctrine, or sound teaching. This is exactly why in 5:1-6:2 Paul gave all those instructions about how Christians should relate to one another. Those instructions are sound doctrine or sound teaching.

Now... read 1 Timothy 6:3-5 and you will get it right.

³ If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, ⁴ he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

You get a pretty good idea that Paul was referring to those in chapter 1 who wanted to be teachers of the Mosaic Law but didn't really understand it. They were pressing an incorrect and legalistic understanding of the Mosaic Law without attention to personal godliness. They were proudly confident that they were the ones who had a corner on the truth of the Law. And their conversations with people were not filled with virtue, but were contentious. In addition one of their core motivations in this was to gain financially by their teaching. One commentator wrote, "In that day the stipends associated with ministry were attractive, so that even the best men had to be warned against letting personal gain creep into their motivation (cf. 1 Peter 5:2). Congregational leaders were to be chosen from those known for their 'freedom from the love of money' (cf. 1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7)."¹ Then Paul, keying off of the financial motivation of those who taught the Law incorrectly and the word "gain", returned to instructions of sound doctrine for Timothy.

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

Think slowly about these words. They are sound doctrine. They are healthy teaching from God's viewpoint. Do you think this way?

⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

I want you to think about folks you know, whether they be non-Christians and Christians, who have fallen on the wrong side of this instruction.

Do you want their life, with all its ramifications?

Think about those who preach a prosperity gospel.

¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Do you want to live by sound doctrine? Guard yourself from greed. Pay attention to godliness.

If you are showing characteristics that should not be there, then let it be an alarm that warns something is wrong with the way you are approaching life. Get introspective. Ask God for wisdom. Be diligent in reading God's Word. Seek out why you respond the way you do. Then, adjust your thinking and motivations.

You see, Paul wrote here to Timothy things that became sound doctrine.

¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p. 746.