

truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.” (Acts 20:25-31 NIV)

Paul had proclaimed the *whole* will of God. He had not avoided those things that might have caused him personal pain or might have been displeasing to those whom he preached. He declared himself “*innocent of the blood of all men*” because he didn’t *avoid* the difficult or unpopular teachings. He taught sound doctrine — even when it wasn’t popular! Failing to do so would have caused him to be *unable* to declare that he was “*innocent of the blood of all men.*”

Since, in many circles today, doctrine is believed to be divisive, many preachers and teachers often *avoid* getting into discussions or giving sermons that involve sound doctrine. In those verses above, we should notice that immediately after Paul states “*I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God*” he begins to warn those Elders about false teachers. He tells the Elders that there will even be some from their “*own number*” who will “*distort the truth.*” Evidentially, Paul is convinced that being dedicated to proclaiming the *whole* will of God is *connected* to preventing false teachings. *Thefreedictionary.com* defines “church doctrine” as “the written body of teachings of a religious group that are generally accepted by that group.” For Christians — that would be the Bible — the *whole* Bible. The “*whole will of God*” therefore would absolutely include doctrinal issues — *even* those that might go against the current culture of the time. Apostasy (a *total* departure from one’s religion) *begins* with dismissal of one doctrinal issue at a time. First, there’s just *one* thing that is “uncomfortable” to preach or teach — then there are two, then three. Pretty soon — sound doctrine is rejected (or ignored) all together. Culture has won — faulty reasoning has taken over and the conclusion is drawn that doctrine is just too divisive — so why “go there.” It’s *easy* to fall into the trap of accepting the “intellectual elite’s” reasoning that doctrine *is* outdated. Why *encourage* the opportunity to look like a “country bumpkin” just because of proclaiming the “*whole will of God?*” Staying away from sound doctrine will make one *appear* to be far more loving. In today’s society, teaching sound doctrine often gets a Christian labeled as a “Bible thumper,” “Fundamentalist,” — or worse yet — “one of those right-wing Christians.”

The bottom line here is that apostasy has a cure — it’s teaching sound doctrine — whether it’s doctrine contained in the Founding Documents of our Nation or doctrine contained in the Scriptures. Sound doctrine is *essential* to our commitment of following Christ as well as our commitment to maintaining a strong Nation. When we succumb to falling in line with a culture that tells us sound doctrine is divisive and/or outdated, we can no longer say we are “*innocent of the blood of all men.*”

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# DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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## Apostasy

Apostasy — “a total desertion of or departure from one’s religion, principles, party, cause, etc. (Dictionary.com)

Over the past several years, we have noticed an increasingly prominent trend of more and more individuals intentionally avoiding expressing their belief in God’s Inspired Word. It is almost with *apology* that individuals are even willing to state that they *read* — much less *believe* the Bible. This trend is unhealthy at the least and disastrous at the worst.

Just as in times past, there are those who consider themselves to be the “all-knowing intellectually elite.” There is however a *difference* between the times past and our present time. Because of societies advanced methods of communicating quickly and extensively, those who believe they are part of this “all-knowing intellectually elite” have an expanded ability to portray Bible believing people as “country bumpkins.” This expanded ability has encouraged greater boldness in their affront of Christians. Those “intellectual elites” now find it quite easy to incessantly attempt to convince others that the “poor uninformed people” who believe the Bible is God’s Inspired Word are nothing more than people who are just too simple to understand that placing faith in an “ancient flawed document” is for naught. Those who believe they are the “intellectual elite” consider themselves to be “enlightened” and therefore have knowledge that is moving them toward that which the Bible can not do because the Bible is limited to faith in words that were written and spoken in a culture that was not as intellectually advanced as is ours today. Such individuals are not at all bashful about outwardly stating that the poor souls who believe in the Scriptures are “trapped” if you will, in an outdated belief that society has long since progressed past. These self professed “enlightened people” generally pity (but often have disdain) for those who are “silly enough” to hope in vain for eternal salvation based on a belief in a Savior spoken of in a useless and outdated collection of “literature.”

By dismissing the Bible outright in favor of their “enlightened new and better beliefs,” it is as if the Bible never even *existed*. After all, if Scripture has absolutely *no* relevance anyway — why would anyone be interested in what it has to say — much less be *influenced* by its teachings? What would be the point in giving it *any* consideration if it’s so outdated that it’s deemed worthless to a society that has progressed well past *anything* it has to say?

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This unfortunate trend is not limited only to the Bible. It is taking its toll on all aspects of a culture that has become extremely self-willed and arrogant — not wanting to be ruled or lead by *any* documents, laws or creeds that were penned in an era other than its own. This arrogant attitude means that even our Nation’s Founding Documents are also in danger of being dismissed — also as useless and outdated. Documents such as the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence have been the bedrock on which America has grown and prospered for over 200 years — yet the “intellectually elite” now consider them to be outdated for use in their “advanced society.”

While we have no intentions of getting political here, it is very *important* to realize that apostasy is not limited to Christianity and the Bible. Apostasy is becoming equally apparent in the abandoning of the very principles on which this Nation was founded. One of the most basic of those principles is that our liberty (freedom) is endowed to us by God — not by *man*. That principle is being “hijacked” by the “arrogant elite” of our culture. When a foundational fact that is clearly stated in the Declaration of Independence is *abandoned* because that document is viewed as useless and outdated — apostasy has indeed presented itself. Apostasy is just as real regarding our Nation as it is regarding abandonment of the Scriptures. In many ways, apostasy regarding our Nation and apostasy regarding the Bible are *very closely related* since *both* seek to give man the power that is God’s alone.

So is there anything we can do that will stop the escalation of apostasy in our culture as well as in our churches today? Yes there is! We have a tool at our disposal — all we have to do is use it! It’s called “teaching sound doctrine.”

Doctrine is defined in the Dictionary as —

1. a particular principle, position, or policy taught or advocated
2. something that is taught
3. a body or system of teachings relating to a particular subject:

Let’s pick up now, where we left off in the previous issue of *Diligence*. We ended that article by suggesting that it is essential that sound doctrine — such as was taught by the apostles — also be taught to those whom the Lord has added to His Church. New Christians can not remain steadfast in their new way of life unless they understand the things that are a part of that new way. They must be taught how to watch their life and their doctrine.

*“You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.” (Titus 2:1 NIV)*

*“He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” (Titus 1:9 NIV)*

*“Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Timothy 4:16 NIV)*

We can see from these verses that knowing and understanding sound doctrine is the safeguard that will protect Christians from becoming apostate.

It was not long after Jesus gathered his apostles, that He began to teach them. In Matthew 5:2-10, Jesus begins His sermon with a “list” of traits that His followers should exhibit and the long term results for practicing those traits. Then in verses 11 and 12 of that same chapter, it seems as if Jesus *knew* that those who persist in practicing those distinguishing characteristics *will* experience difficulties with the culture that surrounds them. Jesus said —

*“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (NIV)*

These two verses are full of power for those who trust in them since they demonstrate that from the very beginning of Christ’s ministry, He *knew* opposition would come upon those who believed in Him — just as it had upon the prophets of old.

After laying the groundwork of how believers might expect to be received by the society around them, Jesus then began to teach lessons (doctrines) that are timeless.

*“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matt.5:13-16 NIV)*

In these verses, Jesus makes it clear that those who hear and accept His words have a *responsibility* to the dissident society around them. Believers can not allow anything to cause them to lose their saltiness or dim their light — for when they *do* — they are *“no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.”* It’s not acceptable to be silent in the presence of opposition to the teachings of Jesus. As Christians, we have the knowledge to spread the saving message of the Gospel so we *don’t* have the option of being “low key” and hiding that message under a bowl — we must maintain our saltiness — even if it doesn’t happen to be popular in the culture that surrounds us.

Paul knew how important it was to not shun his responsibility of teaching sound doctrine. Near the end of his life he called together the Elders from Ephesus for one last opportunity to encourage *them* to do the same.

*“Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the*