

Words of Truth

Hiding Behind The Pulpit

By: Brian A. Yeager

There are two types of preachers who hide behind the pulpit. One type of preacher who does this is a man who needs to deal with a sinful situation, which is not public knowledge. This sinful situation should be handled privately (Matthew 5:23-24, Matthew 18:15-17, Luke 17:3-4, Galatians 6:1-2, and James 5:19-20). However, he lacks the courage (I Thessalonians 2:2) to approach the person that is in sin. So, on Sunday morning he preaches a sermon under the cover of the pulpit, so that he does not have to fear confrontation. The other type of man who hides behind the pulpit is one who wants to teach error. This man knows that he cannot present his lesson in a class setting because someone will address what he is teaching (cf. Philippians 1:17). So, he uses that time wherein a “worship service” is being conducted to teach his false doctrine. The one thing both of these types have in common is that they think the fact that worship is to be done decently and in order protects them from being questioned publicly.

“Preachers” Cannot Hide Behind I Corinthians 14:40

If you read I Corinthians 14:40 this is what you’ll find: *“Let all things be done decently and in order.”* Some preachers treat this verse like it is a force field for them when they are behind the pulpit. The man in our first example thinks that he can fire away at the sinner since a discussion cannot occur. The man in our second example thinks he can teach his own opinion since no one can ask him for the Scriptures that prove his statements. Why is it that a person would argue it is indecent and disorderly to correct error when it is preached? Is it that they cannot see that error is indecent and out of order? Why are so-called “preachers” allowed to attack from behind the pulpit?

It is certainly indecent to allow false doctrine to be preached. If you do a word study on the word “decently” in I Corinthians 14:40 you find something that completely contradicts the mindset that it is indecent to correct error in a sermon. The Greek word “euschēmōnōs” can be examined by looking at Strong’s # 2156. Outside of I Corinthians 14:40 you find this word two other times in the New Testament. In both Romans 13:13 and I Thessalonians 4:12 that same Greek word that appears in I Corinthians 14:40 is translated as “honestly”. “Honestly” is also the definition of this Greek term (Strong’s Greek Dictionary). Folks, how are we behaving honestly if false doctrine is being taught in our presence? The Scriptures clearly dictate that we must avoid and expose all false doctrine and those teaching it (Psalms 119:104, Psalms 119:128, Proverbs 19:27, Jeremiah 23:32, Romans 16:17-18, Galatians 2:1-5, Ephesians 5:11, I Timothy 1:3-4, I Timothy 6:20, Titus 1:10-11, and I John 4:1).

For those that would argue that it is disorderly for a man to speak up and expose error being taught in the pulpit, they need to read this: *“They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them”* (Proverbs 28:4). The order of worship is not affected at all when a man prevents

error from being taught or an ungodly personal attack is being made on a brother or sister in Christ. That being said, order can be affected if someone takes this too far.

We Can't Get Too Loose Either

I Corinthians 14:40 still dictates that the worship assembly is not a casual time for discussion. Therefore, we cannot turn a sermon into a Bible class. The worship assembly is not supposed to have people talking here, there, and everywhere (I Corinthians 14:26-33). The same reverence we show when partaking of the Lord's Supper, singing, praying, etc. must be shown during sermons. That being said, once again, we should not allow error to go on during any part of our worship to God (Acts 15:1-2 and Jude 3-4).

We must also be clear here that while I Corinthians 14:40 does not protect a man from being corrected when he's preaching, this does not mean a woman can do the correcting. There are two reasons for this fact. For one, in the context of discussing an assembly for worship, we find this command: *"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church"* I Corinthians 14:34-35). Secondly, and this point applies regardless of the location, a woman is not permitted to teach or usurp authority over a man (I Timothy 2:9-15). Now, if we keep in mind the purpose of teaching, the pulpit will never be used as a shield for inappropriate activity.

Hiding Behind The Pulpit Shows Ignorance In The Purpose Of Teaching

I have never understood the "preacher" who does not take the opportunity to speak to brethren face to face about their errors (I Thessalonians 3:10, II John 12, and III John 13-14). Why would a preacher wait for Sunday, in a sermon, to address error when that "preacher" knows tomorrow is not promised (James 4:13-15)? Where is the sense of urgency in this type of person (Proverbs 27:1 and II Corinthians 6:1-2)? Teaching the Gospel is about saving souls (I Corinthians 1:18-21 and I Corinthians 15:2).

Some of these "preachers" are really afraid that their brethren will not respond well to private teaching or open discussions. Folks, let's never forget how powerful the word of God is in converting (Psalms 19:7 and Romans 1:16) the honest heart (Jeremiah 29:13 and Luke 8:15). If some brother or sister in Christ refused correction, then they're useless anyway (Proverbs 15:10; 31-32).

For those preachers that are wanting to "get away" with saying something in the pulpit that they would not say in another setting, TO HELL WITH THEM if they fail to repent (Philippians 3:18-19 and II Peter 2:1). False teachers are not "good people" (Matthew 7:15; cf. Jeremiah 14:14 and Jeremiah 29:9).

Conclusion

The pulpit is not a hiding place for the coward or the false teacher. Brethren, we must NEVER allow someone to think that being behind a lectern makes that man untouchable. So-called "preachers" who avoid discussions should be sat down, for they've lost their way (Acts 19:8, II Timothy 4:1-5, Titus 1:5, and Titus 2:15). Lessons that are presented from the pulpit should have no other goal than to help save those who are present (Colossians 1:28).