



# Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

Volume XXI

April 2001

Number 9

## Can A Preacher Hold False Doctrine "Privately" As Long As He Does Not Teach It Publically?

By

Brian R. Kenyon

The above question should evoke an immediate response of "No!" to all who know the Lord. However, there are some in the church who think that a preacher can hold false doctrine as long as he does not teach it publically. Some have been known to say, "Well, it's alright for preacher\_\_\_ to speak hear, even though he holds a false doctrine about \_\_\_\_ . Just so long as he doesn't preach on it, it will be okay." Is this attitude Biblical?

Among the various false doctrines that some hold *privately* are the following: (1) the guilty of fornication spouse is just as free to remarry as the innocent of fornication spouse in a Scriptural divorce (contrary to Mt. 5:31-32; 19:3-12); (2) "social drinking" is not condemned by the Bible (contrary to the numerous passages exposing the dangers of alcohol and 1 Pet. 2:11); (3) Christians may participate in modern dance activities (contrary to the many passages that speak against lasciviousness and 1 Pet. 2:11); (4) there will be no bodily resurrection (contrary to 1 Cor.

15:1-58); and (5) the resurrection of Christ and His church has already occurred (contrary to 1 Cor. 15:51-58; 1 Thes. 4:13-18 cf. 2 Tim. 2:18). This article will not attempt to examine each of these issues. Rather, it will examine the principles involved with the question in the title above, and it will look at some implications involved with the notion that it is acceptable to hold false doctrine *privately*.

### Preliminary Truths

Before dealing with the question, some observations need to be made. First, there is a difference between matters of opinion and matters of doctrine. Preachers may hold different opinions about Bible passages that do not contradict other Bible principles, such as why Nicodemus came to Jesus by night (Jn. 3:2). However, when it comes to the "apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42), there is no room for opinions that violate plain Bible principles (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3).

Second, there is a

difference between a person who is open for discussion on studying an issue and one who refuses to openly



Brian Kenyon

examine evidence. Apollos, at one time, preached what was no longer true (i.e. the baptism of John being applicable to the Ephesians in Acts 18:24-25). Yet, he was open to discussion on further study as is evident by the work of Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:26). As a result, he thenceforth preached the truth (cf. Tit. 3:13). Others refuse to examine evidence, insisting instead on promoting their doctrine. These are ones "whose mouths must be stopped" (Tit 1:11).

Third, the truth on the subjects listed above can be ascertained. For example, one can know whether or not the guilty of fornication spouse is free to remarry following a divorce. When one is unbiased and allows the Scriptures to speak, the answer is clear. Yet, many treat

the subject as if the truth cannot be known, or that it does not matter what one believes about it.

### The Importance Of Doctrine

In determining whether a preacher can hold false doctrine *privately* as long as he does not teach it publically, one must understand the importance of the "doctrine of the Lord" (Acts 13:12). First, the doctrine of the Lord is contained in the God-inspired Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This doctrine is as important as the Inspired Word from which it comes. Paul says of elders that they should "hold fast the faithful word" that they may "be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Tit. 1:9). Notice how "the faithful word" and "sound doctrine" are inseparable. Because this doctrine is derived from the Scriptures, which are the mind of God revealed (1 Cor. 2:6-16), obedience to it is the only way people can be freed from sin (Rom. 6:17-18).

Second, sound doctrine stabilizes every Christian's life. With the coming of "the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God..." (a reference to the complete written revelation of God, cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-13) will come a standard that will keep us from being "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine..." (Eph. 4:13-14). That standard is the doctrine that comes from the word of God (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Timothy is told that if he puts "the brethren in remembrance" of the truths Paul taught, he would be "a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine..." (1 Tim. 4:6).

From these few references it is obvious that sound doctrine is of absolute importance in remaining faithful to God. How much falsehood can one hold before he or she has made sound doctrine unsound? Indeed, any rational person can understand that there is no room for even the slightest bit of false doctrine in belief or practice. For this reason no other doctrine must be taught (or believed) than that found in the Bible (1 Tim. 1:3).

### Holding To Unsound Doctrine

To see the ridiculousness of the idea that a preacher can hold false doctrine *privately* as long as he does not teach it publically, one must examine the passages that reveal the Lord's attitude against those who do not hold sound doctrine. Consider the psalmist, "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way....Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way" (Ps. 119:104, 128). The Lord clearly *hates* every false way. *Every* includes false ways held publically and false ways held *privately*. The Lord had a "few things" against the church in Pergamos; namely, that some held to the "doctrine of Balaam" and to the "doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate" (Rev. 2:14-15). The Bible does not say whether they taught these doctrines publically or merely held them *privately*, but one truth is obvious—the Lord

hates doctrine contrary to His word! Does He hate it any less because it is held *privately*?

What about those who do not adhere to sound doctrine (2 Tim. 4:3)? They are to be marked and avoided (Rom. 16:17), and faithful Christians are not to have fellowship with them (2 Jn. 9-11). God places "any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine" in the same category as lawlessness, disobedience, ungodliness, sinners, unholy and profane people, murderers, "manslayers," whoremongers, "them that defile themselves with mankind," and liars (1 Tim. 1:9-10). To say that one can *privately* hold something "contrary to sound doctrine" is to say that one can *privately* hold any of the sinfulness listed above. False doctrine is false doctrine, whether it is held *privately* or publically. No Christian, especially a preacher, has a right to hold false doctrine.

### Serious Implications

Some serious implications are present in the idea that a preacher is permitted to hold false doctrine *privately*. First, it is

### The Harvesters

Published Monthly  
Florida School of Preaching  
1807 South Florida Avenue  
Lakeland, Florida 33803  
(863) 683-4043

Editor: Jackie M. Stearsman  
Board of Directors

Gordon Methvin, President	Maruite Davis
Paul Thornhill, Vice President	George K. French
J. H. Blackman, Jr., Secretary	E. Robert McAnally
Allen Gardner, Treasurer	Samuel J. Roney
Glenn Burgess	John D. Smitherman
Elmer Burgett	Dale Spung
Jack C. Cronk	Jackie M. Stearsman

TRAINING PREACHERS SINCE 1969

impossible for a preacher who *privately* holds false doctrine to please God. How can such a preacher in good conscious say, like Paul to Timothy, "...thou hast fully known my doctrine..." (2 Tim. 3:10)? Should any preacher be afraid of disclosing what he believes doctrinally? If his doctrinal positions are in accordance with the Gospel, he has no reason to be ashamed (Rom. 1:16). Also, how can a preacher who holds to false doctrine *privately* preach "all the counsel of God" publically (Acts 20:27)? He will have to avoid the topics about which he holds false doctrine. Hiding his false doctrine and avoiding discussions on these topics are deceitful, and deceitful people cannot please God (Mk. 7:22-23).

Second, it is impossible for an honest preacher to hold false doctrine *privately* without teaching it at some point in his life. What will he say when he is either privately or publically asked about his position on the subject on which he holds false doctrine *privately*? If he is honest, he will have to teach the false position he holds—thus, to that extent he has taught false doctrine. How many people must it take for him to teach his false doctrine to privately before it is known publically? If he says something other than what he truly believes when asked, he is being a hypocrite. What is worse, one who holds to false doctrine, or one who will not teach his convictions? If he "takes the fifth" he is in essence admitting that what he holds is unacceptable to those who ask

him, and he leaves others with plenty of reason to distrust him.

### Success

#### In Spreading Error

The preacher who holds false doctrine *privately* is more successful in spreading his error throughout the church. Consider some reasons why this is true. First, he is free to teach his doctrine privately to the brethren. How many churches have been destroyed by false teachers selling their heresy first to individual members and small groups of the local church? Indeed, whether the Boston/Crossroads doctrine or the "anti-Biblical expediency" doctrine, heresies have taken over churches that were once faithful. Bringing in false doctrine *privately* was also destructive in NT times (cf. Gal. 2:4; 2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 3-4).

Second, the preacher who holds to false doctrine *privately* does not have to publically answer for it. If these preachers had to publically defend their error, how many would continue to hold it? If more brethren knew that these preachers hold false doctrine *privately*, how often would they be used in meetings, lectureships, or journals?

Third, when the preacher who holds to false doctrine *privately* is not exposed, then others promote his heresy (intentionally or unintentionally) when they use him in meetings, lectureships, and journals. When such a preacher's false position is well known in a particular area, and he appears on a program in

another area, he and his false doctrine are endorsed, at least to those who know the situation. Even after the program directors or editors have been warned, some still insist on keeping the preacher who holds to false doctrine *privately* on the program. Why?

### Conclusion

The idea that a preacher can hold false doctrine *privately* as long as he does not teach it publically is totally inconsistent with Biblical teaching. Christians have an obligation to warn others about preachers whom they know hold false doctrine. Elderships, lectureship directors, and journal editors have an obligation to check into those who appear on their programs to make sure they are sound. God be thanked for those who have the courage to cancel meetings, or replace lectureship speakers and article writers who are found out to hold false doctrine, whether publically or *privately*.



### Student Spotlight



**Bruce Roberts**

Bruce Roberts was born in Ohio and relocated to Florida in 1981. He was baptized into the Lord's church in 1990. Bruce began attending the Florida School of Preaching in August 2000. Prior to

attending FSOP he attended Valencia Community College.

Bruce and his wife (Bev) have two children and two grandchildren. Bruce is presently teaching a youth class, an adult class, and preaching when the opportunity arises. His wife is teaching the toddlers' class, ladies class, and is a Bible correspondence teacher with Truth for the World.

After finishing school, Bruce plans to preach full time, and he and his wife hope to do mission work in the future. Bruce and other students may be reached by contacting the Florida School of Preaching.



[The following letter was mailed to all those registering during the 2001 lectureship. We are reproducing it here that it may have the widest circulation possible. Would you consider what we have written and keep our work before

you? If you have not purchased the lectureship book, you need to purchase it. Why not see that elders and preachers have a copy of it? Consider donating a copy for the church library.]  
March 19, 2001

Dear brothers and sisters,

We appreciate your interest in the Florida School of Preaching. We try to make the Lectureship an extension of the school, and to choose topics and speakers that will contribute to this end. We also keep in mind that many of you attend the Lectureship and will benefit by the oral presentations and the publication of our lectures in book form. At this date we have ten full-time students and ninety three who are in the extension classes.

The school must use funds you contribute to maintain the present level of school and publication of the lectureship books. Each year the cost of our operation goes up. We try to call on much of our work to be done

by volunteer help, however, this does not mean that expenses are not increased from time to time. For example, this past Lectureship cost the school approximately \$4,000.00 more than the previous year. We have never taken special collections to defray the costs during Lectureship. We have always depended upon the voluntary generosity of those attending. We hope to keep this as a policy, and we will, with the help of those who believe in us and support us.

As you make plans to be with us in 2002, would you keep the school in mind. Help us find good students to train for gospel preachers. Keep in mind the expense of the Lectureship and, if you can, encourage others to assist us with funds for it. We would appreciate it.

"Do You Understand Worship?" has been chosen as the theme for 2002. The dates will be January 21-24, 2002. We look forward to hearing from you and seeing you then.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jackie M. Stearsman, Director

Return Service Requested

WEB SITE: [www.fsop.net](http://www.fsop.net)

E-MAIL: [fsop@gte.net](mailto:fsop@gte.net)

FAX: 863-683-0750

PHONE (863) 683-4043 (800) 320-9780

LAKELAND, FLORIDA 33803-2653

1807 SOUTH FLORIDA AVENUE

FLORIDA SCHOOL OF PREACHING

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Lakeland, FL  
PERMIT #235