

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

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Editor's Note: The following article was written by brother Needham in 1966 and some of the specific controversies he mentions may not be applicable today but the attitudes that produce these problems are still prevalent today. There is an arrogance in false teachers. Often, when one departs from the truth and is challenged, he says, "I understand where you are coming from; I once was there." The thought is, "I once believed as you do but when you become as informed as I am now you will agree with me." False teachers look upon anyone who disagrees with them as being ignorant and tradition bound. It may be they know and love the truth and refuse to compromise the truth. (JH)



New Controversies Being Raised

The church has always had controversy. Controversy raged in the days of the apostles over the Gentiles' relationship to circumcision and other parts of the law, idolatry, fornication, etc. Paul says:

"For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1 Corinthians 11:19).

This indicates that controversies will always be common among God's people. While this is true, we do not think Paul is trying to encourage controversy AS SUCH. Controversy designed to "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3) is controversy which is necessary and essential, but controversy stirred by individuals infected by "issue-itis" is not necessarily approved by God.

That all controversy is NOT approved by God is very evident to serious Bible students. Notice the following passages:

"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations" (Romans 14:1).

"Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith; so do" (1 Timothy 1:4).

"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmising, perverse disputing of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself" (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

"O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith" (1 Timothy 6: 20).

"Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers" (2 Timothy 2: 14).

"But SHUN profane and vain babblings for they will increase unto more ungodliness" (2 Timothy 2:16).

These passages point up one thing very clearly, namely, that not all controversy is good! He who says it is, will have to take issue with Paul and the Holy Spirit.

It is not unusual to hear some brother say, "We ought not to be afraid to discuss anything. Discussion is a healthy sign." I realize full well that there is an element of truth in such a statement, but it is not true under all circumstances. If so, why the passages herein quoted? I would be afraid and ashamed to raise controversy over the matters mentioned in the above passages. They, according to Paul and the Holy Spirit, should not be raised. He is condemned who raises questions of the nature mentioned.

This points up a very pertinent consideration: we should be very

careful of the issues we raise. Make sure they are not of the nature of those matters mentioned in the passages quoted.

Today new controversies are being initiated over such questions as:

1. Whether elders and deacons are an appointive office (work).
2. Whether there is such a thing as a local church.
3. Whether we should hold up our hand while baptizing one.
4. Should an elder be a married man?

Those raising these controversies are characterized by the following traits:

1. They like to brand all who differ with them as keepers of orthodoxy, tradition bound, closed-minded, and afraid to think beyond the practices of the past.
2. They seem to place themselves on some sort of an intellectual pinnacle, conceiving of himself as having advanced beyond the common herd. The rest of us are just "dumb sheep" who should rush anxiously to their feed troughs and swallow without question what they have decided we should believe and practice.
3. They seemingly take pride in non-conformity. They proudly announce themselves as iconoclasts (one who breaks down idols). These supposed idols are such things as believing elders have to be married, that elders are an appointive office (work), holding up the hand when baptizing one, and believing that the guilty party in a divorce case cannot remarry.
4. They are pre-convinced that the great majority of the brotherhood will want to deny them the right to be heard, and will not take kindly to their efforts. I know of nobody who denies them the right to be heard, but I know many who deny them the right to be taken very seriously, and the right to stir controversy over such matters at such a time as this.

I think there is a certain amount of danger involved in the up-coming controversy. One will find in the majority of churches a number of people who are just waiting for a chance to attack the elders, the preacher, the church etc. and any theory that gives them an

excuse to do so will be quickly embraced. Here is the great danger, and at this point we need to be on guard. Preaching the truth is the answer.

There are some brethren who seem to be the avowed enemies of peace. They are not happy in the absence of turmoil and strife. They do not *"follow after things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another"* (Romans 14:19), but rather, they seek for constant controversy and endless strife over matters which have been discussed through the ages but have never been settled because they are matters of private privilege, personal judgment, vain imagination, or hurtful speculation.

Such brethren are always complaining of unfair treatment based upon the reluctance of brethren to allow them free course in parading their doubts and opinions, but they do not hesitate to impugn the motives and castigate all who refuse to go along with them. One might hold to long established practices and beliefs on the basis of tradition, but then he might also cling to them because they are the truth and he sincerely believes them. Those who delight in such controversies have no lease on learning, no franchise on faith, no monopoly on mental power, and no one-sided sincerity. May we stand fast in the faith and quit ourselves like men (1 Cor. 16: 13).

✍ James P. Needham

Belleville church of Christ

5635 S County Rd 200E - Belleville, IN - (317) 539-5258

www.bellevillechurch.net

Schedule of Services

Sunday Bible Study	9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship	10:30 a.m.
Sunday Evening Worship	5:00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study	7:00 p.m.

Evangelist

James Hahn (317) 745-1507