

When Brethren Differ

It is a touchy little subject, but one that the casual observer cannot deny: brethren differ.

As we go through life, we are faced with the inevitable conflicts among men: people differ over how people differ. Man is a creature of observation and judgment. When we observe something, we make a judgment concerning what was observed.

It's interesting to observe the political arena. You talk about differences! Politicians have more differences than you can shake a stick at and the adage, "two things you don't discuss in public are politics and religion" is as true today as it was when it was first stated. Politics and religion go to the heart of each one of us.

When individuals challenge our political or religious beliefs, they have a fight on their hands. But the reality is: we all differ on one point or another. There are several ways to view differences. Let's say we differ on an issue. Simply put, I believe one way and you believe another. What is our obligation under such circumstances? We can recognize that we simply do not see eye to eye on the subject and continue to study; we can get angry and not speak; we can talk to others about how much of a heretic our antagonist is. Or we can kill those with whom we differ.

Severe you say. I think not. In Matthew 12:1-14, the Lord was charged twice with committing unlawful acts. But the Lord dealt with his antagonists in such a way that they couldn't contradict him. So, what did they do? "But the Pharisees went out, and took counsel against him, how they might destroy him." On the heels of that decision, the Pharisees attempted to discredit the Lord by saying "This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub the prince of the demons" (vs. 24). What can they do now? They charged Him with practicing error ... false. They accused Him of demonic practices ... false. Ah! we will attempt to trip him up in His teaching. In Matthew 22:23-33, 34 cf. Luke 20:40, the Sadducees approached the

Lord concerning the resurrection. He "put the Sadducees to silence" and "they durst not any more ask him any question." "But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, gathered themselves together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, trying him" (Matthew 22:34-35). The Pharisees brought in the big guns! But the Lord answered their question and then asked them one of His own. "And no one was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions" (vs. 46).

What's left? Repentance? Sure, that option is there but that would upset their whole apple cart. And frankly, they were sick of the Lord anyway. So, Luke 22:2, "the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might put him to death; for they feared the people" (Luke 22:2-6). But, having found a willing accomplice (Judas) "they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he consented, and sought opportunity to deliver him unto them in the absence of the multitude." The rest, as they say, is history.

Throughout the history of man, men have killed men over religious and political questions. From Cain and Abel to the "holy wars" of our own day, people have killed. The sad part of all this is the killing that goes on in the Lord's church. Not in a physical way, but killings that take place in the heart. "For this is the message which ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another: not as Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:11-16).

Brethren can and will differ. Brethren, when those differences result in bitterness, jealousy and faction in the heart, James says, "glory not and lie not against the truth" (3:14). ret