

TRIALS, EXTREMES AND DEVICES
STUDY II
Br. Ted Smith

(Before you proceed with Study II we request that you go back and restudy the first 3 paragraphs of Study I of this series.)

We as Bible Students are having some experiences with one another over differences of opinion that are anything but happy. As far as we can tell, there is no lack of love of the Harvest Message itself; neither is there failure to recognize the means used of the Lord to give us our “meat in due season.” So, what is the matter? May it not be possible that we are missing something in the way of conduct toward one another? There is something more to the Christian life, and having the Lord’s approval, than a mere acceptance of the teachings of the Harvest Message. Certain conduct is necessary, and it is extremely important that the principles of Christian conduct be thoroughly understood and put into practice. Needless to say this applies to all of us.

We wish to repeat that which was clearly stated in study I, that we are concerned with differences of opinion “IN THE TRUTH,” and not with differences held by brethren who are saying “Our Pastor was wrong.”

We have been thinking of our problems, and we remembered something our Pastor emphasized in an article on the proper and the improper use of our faculty of combateness. On Reprint page 4994 there is an article entitled LOVE OF THE BRETHREN A CRUCIAL TEST; and on Reprint page 4995 there is an interesting declaration of the Pastor in these words: “The difficulty seems to be that there is a tendency in such matters to fight each thought to the finish, to want everybody to agree with us, whereas the proper way is to be content and let the matter rest.” (Last sentence of par. 4.) The next paragraph starts out as follows: “Each brother has a right to his own opinion. We have no right to make our own views tests.” Then the Pastor briefly touches upon a few of the things that are tests; and so we have a basis for proper reasoning.

Let us take for example, our honest differences on the matter of the Great Company being in the Nominal System, Vs., the Great Company not in the Nominal System. Would not the suggestions of the Pastor be applicable to such a difference? Does not each one have a right to his own opinions; and why should there be a disposition to “fight each thought to the finish, to want everybody to agree with us?”

This brings us to the particular point of Study II—there exists today tense feelings of brethren toward one another because of differences over the “1000 year reign”. May it not be that in reality, it is not the differences per se that is causing the strains, but the strains are rooted in the failure to control combateness, and there is an antagonistic

spirit IN THE HEART? If this is true, then we have work to do—work to attain the proper heart condition. Possibly we have a wrong attitude of heart that needs changing. If we do have honest differences, then the proper spirit would be to treat one another with courtesy, and avoid the use of harsh language of any kind, when we discuss our differences. Another thing, it gets wearisome to constantly harp on our differences. When we see that there are set opinions, we should grant full liberty to hold these set opinions and not think we must fight to the “bitter end.” In speaking of a “bitter end” there might be something alarming in the idea—the “end” might be “bitter” in that the development of the proper spirit in the heart might necessitate some severe experiences from the Lord to help us to see the truth of the matter. (On the fact of “set opinions” please turn to the single page of Item #150 [Personal Remarks by Br. Smith accompanying the booklet “Our Lord’s Return—His Parousia, Apokalupsis And Epiphania”—1900 Edition] and note the phrase in paragraph 4—“our minds do not always work the same”; and the phrase in paragraph 6—“our heads are not all alike”.)

If we stop and reason honestly, we will come to see that nothing harmful to belief or character, or being in the service of God, will result to brethren who differ with one another on this question. And nothing harmful results when we grant one another liberty of thought on this question. Surely we can go right on witnessing to the truth the same as usual; we can go right on in our development of character; we can continue to rejoice in the promises and strive to make our calling and election sure; and we can continue to go right on doing good to all men, especially to the household of faith. So would it not be the course of wisdom and love to use caution and restrain our natural combativeness when we have differences?

And it would not seem right either, to suppose that to get along we must restrain all liberty of expression. This would not be an ideal condition in the exercise of liberty in Christ. The proper spirit would seem to be to control our natural combativeness, and put a leash on combativeness when it would tend to create barriers between us and into the possible danger of “biting and devouring one another.” It is good for our characters to try to attain the highest and best in the understanding and attainment of the spirit of a sound mind and the spirit of justice and love in our dealings with one another. We are being prepared for use in the next age—we must attain and practice now in this life.

Would it seem reasonable to think the Lord would regard one as finished in character development, ready for his change, if there existed in his heart estranged feelings toward the brethren because combativeness had been misused? If he had a “fight on” with the brethren because they did not agree with him, would such a brother be ready for his change? We can all ponder this question with profit no doubt.

On page 6538 of the Reprints, col. 3 there is a list of comments of the Pastor on the subject of COMBATIVENESS. The writer of this Study II found some very wholesome

advice from the pen of the Pastor, particularly the article entitled LOVE OF THE BRETHREN A CRUCIAL TEST (Reprint page 4994). There is a reason for these strained conditions in our midst; and we might profit greatly by considering carefully this matter of the proper use of our combativeness, and the necessity of keeping it under intelligent control of reason, justice and love. The proper spirit in the heart may be the key to our getting along with one another when we have honest and sincere differences; and to this end we must set aside the wish and insistence that we must see exactly alike on these differences that are not the basis of our relationship to one another in Christ.

While on the subject of “strained feelings” we might mention another matter that needs attention. If we do not read carefully what a brother has written, we can misjudge him and even misrepresent him to others. Knowing this to be true, the writer was very careful to point out that his remarks in paragraph 4 of Item #150 were restricted to certain subjects. In the last paragraph of this item were these words in brackets: “(Incidentally, we are restricting these remarks of ours to the differences mentioned in paragraph four above, so there will be no misunderstanding.)” And paragraph four touched upon these differences and named them specifically. In justice to the writer, no one should expand the writer’s remarks to other subjects or differences not named.