

Debate Challenge Accepted  
Weldon Warnock

Recently, brother Jeff Belknap of Beckley, West Virginia issued a challenge to six different men for an oral or written debate. Sounds like he is ready for business. I was the second one on the list. Jeff submitted two propositions, an affirmative and a negative, on the marriage, divorce and remarriage issue. I accepted his challenge, agreeing to debate the propositions he formulated, although they do not cover the entire spectrum of the issue, but do serve as a basis for discussion.

I offered one prerequisite to Jeff's proposal and that was that we have the debate in Beckley, West Virginia. But lo and behold, he backed right down. He offered the following lame excuse: "The church in Beckley is the same congregation where Weldon was the preacher for ten years, and he still maintains a close relationship with some of our members. Hence, it would be inexpedient to the unity of the Lord's church in Beckley to hold the debate here, due to the personalities involved and their relationships with the local membership." He goes on to say that the men of the congregation have urged him not to debate me "in or near Beckley" because of the same concerns. But I learned that this is just some of the men, while other men and several ladies would like to have the debate in Beckley, if we are going to have one. It seems to me that since both Jeff and I have preached in Beckley that Beckley would be the logical place to debate our differences.

Let us draw some implications from what brother Belknap said as quoted above:

1. If you are afraid of disrupting the unity of the church in Beckley if the debate is held there, why don't you have the same fear of disrupting the unity of the church or churches in some other city where the debate would be conducted? Is it that you do not care to be divisive somewhere else, just not in Beckley? I have a good relationship with many, many brethren all over the country. If I should not debate you in Beckley because of my relationship with the brethren there, then that rules me out about everywhere else because of my relationship with those brethren.

2. Jeff stated he doesn't want the debate in or near Beckley. How far away would we have to get to be outside of "near Beckley"? You reckon if we just barely got outside Raleigh County (where Beckley is located) that we would qualify as far as distance?

3. In regard to dividing the church in Beckley, Jeff has already taken care of that by himself. I preached there ten years and we had no disturbance. This so-called "mental divorce" (a misnomer) never came up. It was not until brother Belknap arrived on the scene and cranked up his computer that confusion and dissension on MDR started. He began putting on his website every little tidbit of those with whom he disagreed and presenting it in the context of heresy. He set out to poison the minds of some of the members in Beckley that I was a false teacher. He claims he interrogated all preachers who were, and are, scheduled to hold meetings at Beckley as to their position on MDR. If they did not pass the litmus test, the meeting was cancelled. He didn't ask them about other issues; just MDR. Now, he is concerned about being divisive if we have a debate in Beckley.

Pshaw!

4. Jeff said he wanted the debate in a central place. Well, central would be about half way between Scottsville, Kentucky, my home, and Beckley, West Virginia where Jeff lives. As the crow flies that would be in the mountain region of southeastern Kentucky in the vicinity of a little community called Dwarf. But friends, he is not interested in a central location, but just getting the debate out of Beckley. He even proposed that we have the debate here in Scottsville, Kentucky. What does that tell you? Then I understand he had an offer from one of his sympathizers to have it in Louisville; just anywhere but in or near Beckley. He evidently does not want to be exposed in Beckley. What is he afraid of in Beckley?

5. Since Jeff thinks a debate in Beckley would cause friction in the church there which he has already done), how is he going to prevent brethren there from attending a debate if we have it somewhere else? We are led to believe that it won't divide the church in Beckley if they come and listen to the debate outside of Beckley, but if they listen to it in or near Beckley, it will be divisive. What convoluted reasoning. Too, you suppose the brethren in Beckley would want a video tape or audio cassettes of the debate and hear it that way? Why would it divide the church if they hear the debate in Beckley, or near there, but it will not divide the church there if they get the tapes and listen/watch the debate in their homes?

Our brother Belknap is most eager to shelter the brethren in Beckley that they not hear both sides on the MDR issue. Wonder why? Of what is he afraid? He is most willing and content to sit behind his computer and "let it rip." He doesn't mind the brethren in Beckley logging on to his website and read controlled, voluminous material on MDR, but they must be protected from hearing an open discussion on the same subject, lest they become divided. What a convenient, self-serving way of getting out of a debate in Beckley, West Virginia. Brother Belknap, I am ready for a debate in Beckley!

What doth hinder you? You can no longer pretend to be courageous and bold by challenging for a debate and then "weasel" out. As the old-timers would say, "It is time to come up to the lick log."

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