

THE HOUR OF TEMPTATION

(Br. Jerry Leslie at the North Seattle Bible Students Convention, on Saturday the 15th of September, 1979)

John the Revelator was instructed to write to the Church at Philadelphia: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

The word "temptation" is defined by Strong's Concordance as "A putting to proof by experience." There are two aspects to this: (1) One hour that is brief and intense. (2) It comes on the whole world; the Church is not exempt. "Judgment begins at the house of God."

Since temptation exists only in weakness, it behooves us to be informed and strengthened against these temptations. This hour of temptation was reserved for the HARVEST, in the Laodicean period. It is not only to shake the last remnants of the social order, but to prove, shake, separate and gather the Church home.

The HARVEST is more than separating the Lord's people from the systems: First the tares are bundled; then there is the separating of the heads of wheat from stalk and roots; there is a winnowing of the bare seed from chaff; the wheat is gathered into the barn; and there is a burning of the tares and plowing the field for a new planting.

Until we are all in the heavenly barn, we are still subject to the Hour of Temptation. It is our experience that, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Prov. 29:18.

It was true after the apostles fell asleep that many fell away. It was so after the reformers with their ambitious ideals passed from the scene that the followers ceased to protest errors and were content to fence their creeds. And it was so when the Seventh Messenger was taken home that some of the sheep who had not made the vision their own, were scattered.

At the risk of over-simplification, we will say that three elements which make this a day of temptation are: (1) Selfish ambition. (2) Delusions and error. (3) Fear.

Selfish ambition by definition is a commitment to one's own interests and desires at the cost of responsibility to others. Selfishness and ambition are operating among the nations and driving them insanely to wars and revolutions—driving them to seek commercial supremacy at the expense of others. This spirit is seen among all peoples in strikes, protests and lockouts. Everyone is anxious to serve self, willing to fight for honors, privileges, positions.

From Creation, man has had trouble meeting his responsibilities. Soon after the transgression in Eden, Adam passed responsibility to Eve; and she passed it on to the serpent.

Cain had trouble gaining God's approval of his offering. His anger and jealousy led to the act of murder: **Cain**, "Where is Abel?" "I know not." But he did know; and he adds to his irresponsibility by saying, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Who else, should have been? He **was** his brother's keeper, and all men should so be.

The process of the mind when seeking to justify self is indeed complex. For 6,000 years man has been violating conscience, seeking ways to justify self and inventing more permissive gods. The evil fruitage of this course is evident in this Hour of Temptation. Every moral quality is violated somewhere. Laws are disregarded, and selfish pursuits are chosen before a neighbor's need.

Sometimes this spirit that permeates the atmosphere of our lives is breathed by the Church. It can lead to anarchy in the church if not anarchy at least with unkind words, accusations, or adjusting positions where things will be made easier "for ME" even if it costs "you MORE!"

Selfishness is a preoccupation with the needs of the flesh, real or fancied. The antidote for selfishness is helpfulness, responsibility to others. This begins with GOD. We owe him unqualified loyalty. Conscience and conduct must first be measured against His Will. He is too wise to err. We dare not trust our judgment alone. The more we set our affections on Him and our Lord Jesus, the less we will be preoccupied with self. When was the last time we sought out Jesus as our friend and companion? When have we meditated on His words and discovered another dimension of His character? To the extent we do, we will see life from the Divine standpoint, and less from the perspectives of the flesh.

Then there is the responsibility to our brethren, those walking toward the same goal—those trying to keep their flesh on the altar. We have a responsibility to them, to be helpful, encouraging, to give kind words, gentle warnings where necessary; realizing the Lord is their Judge, as he is ours. It is our responsibility to be an example of godliness. Can you be a temporal help? Do it! Try to be even more sensitive to the spiritual needs of others. Ours is not to solve all their problems, or to make decisions for them; but it is to give our best understanding when needed, a listening ear, a scripture, or a smile, a readiness to bear part of their load.

I believe that in proportion as we are weighted with our own fleshly wants, we will experience more and more sorrow and disappointment. They will never be realized.

Hunger of the heart, though not an outgrowth of selfishness itself, if not controlled can lead to much self-seeking, distractions in this Hour of Temptation.

Loneliness is the heart's hunger and is but acknowledgment that man is not self-sufficient; but left unchecked tends to choke our new hopes and estrange us from the source of light and joy. Self pity is an insidious poison.

But has Jehovah erred? Are there no compensating magnets to keep the compass of our hearts true to the pole? Has he invited us upon this perilous voyage and abandoned us without chart or rudder? The great ships which plow the sea, have their great master compass. In theory the needle points true to the magnetic pole. But that pole is leagues removed, and every piece of iron in the ship's hull, in her engines, in passing vessels, in deposits in the bottom of the sea. These influence that needle too. So, very carefully-made smaller magnets are so placed as to counteract the influence of things close by, that the subtle influence of the North may still lead the ship true.

It is not wrong that the great compass should feel the local forces, but if, and to the extent that it moves, it ceases to be a reliable compass and will cause confusion, dismay, perhaps even shipwreck. These local magnetic fields do not harm the ship if they but pull in the same direction as the North Pole. And, if the influence we exert on one another is the influence of the spirit of unselfish love—the image of Christ in us—we shall draw one another toward that image; we shall build one another up in the most holy faith and not tear down. Jesus gave us all that he had; and it was enough. It is seldom that our storehouse of blessing is so scant that we cannot give even a smile. And who knows how much warmth it starts?

When the heart's yearning seems more than we can bear, let us remember—we have undertaken a voyage, and we must not blindly answer every call without listening to the compensating magnets—the example of holy conquerors who went before us, or the words of the Apostles, such as, "Center your minds on things above ... that when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, ye also might appear with Him in glory." Surely we would not wish to sell our glorious birthright for a mess of pottage, be it ever so fine. If we keep our hearts ever sensitive to the drawing of that far-away, yet mighty magnet, though beset with blizzard, cloud and mist, we shall pass safely into port and "meet our pilot face to face."

The second characteristic of the Hour of Temptation is ERROR. Paul called it "Strong delusions" in 2 Thess. 2:11.

The world is saturated with lies by the father of the first lie. But today general education is so widespread and information so available to all, that people have been pulled in every direction by all forms of political, religious, social and economic propaganda.

Some have turned skeptical and don't know what to believe. Therefore the terms: right, left, liberal, conservative, revolutionary, patriotic, reformed, prejudice—all representing directions people are pulled toward or warned against.

Exaggerations and misrepresentations are published in the papers every day. One sector protests nuclear power plants with accusations that they are built at unsafe locations, inadequate control systems exist, that they pollute the environment and that no way has yet been found to contain the waste with a deadly life-span of 24,000 years. Another sector says we are depleting our natural resources and the power of the atom is the logical alternative, that it is clean and resourceful—the answer to growing energy demands; that fewer people have suffered or died than in coal mines.

So most people don't know how to sort out the truth from error. This spirit permeates society and the issues of truth and error have become a vital issue for brethren in this Hour of Temptation.

We sing: “Truth, how sacred is the treasure, teach us Lord its worth to know.” But is its worth always known to us? Personally, I wanted to know God's Truth. I came into the truth with the tutoring of some studious elders. The Covenants, the Jubilee, Gentile Times, Restitution, Kingdom Prophecies of Israel, the Church, World and Symbols were discussed regularly.

But as years passed, we saw variations and sometimes discordant notes on the once melodic theme. I didn't always have an answer for other interpretations. We heard different explanations of the symbols and conditions: Israel was not the earthly Seed; the Jubilee begins at the end of the Millennium; the Parallels were not valid since the church did not go home in 1914; the Millennial reign is future, along with the Times of Restitution; and “That Servant” of Matt. 24 became the church class in the end of this Gospel Age.

But when I sat down and studied the Scriptures and the Harvest Message, our understanding became more than belief by the hearing of the ear. We had to sort truth from error and found the truth even more refreshing. It is the only way. We have to study it out for ourselves, with the Lord as our Teacher.

Of late we hear opposite extremes of those who put most of the Millennial age events future; that not only is the Millennial age begun in the past, but the Gospel age is finished, the Harvest is past, the vine of the earth has been trod, and in certain senses the New Covenant has already begun.

What happened to the “overlapping of the ages” when the plowman overtakes the reaper and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed? (Amos 9:13) I try to be sensitive to

statements used to counter others extreme statements. Defensive research tends to look for confirmation of pre-conceived conclusions. Truth is still found in quiet meditation at the spring of truth.

We must remember the truth came TO US at great cost. It came TO US, not FROM US, but by others the Lord has used. It is not of private interpretation. This should keep us humble: keep us seeking in our heart for truth—search beyond popular appeals.

Some have given up the quest, saying, “Love is the principle thing”; “Let us cover our differences.” Others say, “We must love the truth first before we can love brethren.” Well, we have lived just about long enough to see some go nearly full cycle—those pressing for maximum standards, now willing to accept less for peace. And those once broad in tolerance of divergent explanations, now insistent on one viewpoint as a basis for fellowship and acceptance to the Lord in the Body. But it is a rare and precious thing to see brethren maturing in understanding and also depth of fellowship and helpfulness.

In this Hour of Temptation, Satan will push us to extremes or in exasperation give up. We need to understand principles to guide us through the storms of truth’s struggle with error. Principles never change, but conditions do. While conditions affect us all, we must strive to let principles affect us most, conditions least.

Our responsibility to the truth is two fold: (1) To know as much and as clearly as we can of God’s truth. This is a meeting of our mind with God’s mind. Philosophize as we may, as which truths are important, and which are not—understanding as much as we can is greatly to be desired. (Prov. 2:4-6; 4:7.) This is never to be flaunted. The wise man knows how little he knows. He who thinks he knows much, knows little. (2) Then we are responsible to represent the truth to one another and the world as much and as clearly as we can. Truth was never given us to hold to ourselves. The more truth that is shared, the more glory is given to the Father of all light. Our privilege is to represent God as fully as the Scriptures have represented Him to us—as far and as wide as there are “ears to hear.”

But how then can we love those who see differently in truth perception and appreciation? God is the perfect example. He deals in absolute truth Himself; yet not one of his children knows truth as clearly as does He. His children only know His truth in part; yet God does not love his children in part. He loves them fully. What differs is the measure of provision He makes for this one and that one. The privileges and graces of the Holy Spirit differ according to our capacity, not according to His readiness or willingness to give.

So what do we do with one another with whom we disagree? What else—love them. We do not love them more than the truth; but we love each other as the Lord loves us.

Love them and give of your heart and mind according to their capacity to receive and be blessed by your fellowship. Surely this will mean different depths of fellowship with brethren and sometimes will determine even the subjects shared and spontaneity of relationships.

But let not our choice to give or how much to give be measured by how much we receive from fellowship. What if God only gave in proportion as he receives from us, or if Jesus gave according as he received from even his disciples? We are continually receiving; He is continually giving. Between brethren, some mostly know only of receiving and have not learned much yet how to give; yet there must be those who mostly give of service, time, devotion, patience—whose only reward for now is the knowledge that it is done as unto the Lord and based upon His Truth.

Now consider the enemy FEAR. Like barnacles on a ship, fears hinder progress and if not removed will surely keep the Christian from reaching his haven of peace. Fear paralyzes. It is how the lion freezes his prey. Fear will paralyze us from daring to go on in uncharted waters, trusting only our Lord.

The temptation is to not go forward; but neither can we retreat. The Lord said to Laodicea, “I would that ye were either hot or cold.” Brethren, there is no progress, nor will we ever achieve the goal without RISK. No risk means always planting your feet where they have always been before. It is fear that hinders the Great Company from letting loose their hold on the flesh and comfortable environs. Heb. 2:15.

Does not our Master tell us gently but plainly: “Do not accumulate for yourselves treasures upon the earth where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but deposit for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust can consume, and where thieves break not through nor steal. For where thy treasure is, there thy heart will also be. The lamp of the body is thine eye; if therefore, thine eye be clear, thy whole body will be enlightened; but if thine eye be dim, thy whole body will be darkened. If, then, that light which is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate one, and love the other; or, at least, he will attend to one, and neglect the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. Therefore I charge you, be not anxious about your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor about your body, what ye shall wear. Is not the life of more value than food, and the body than raiment? Observe the birds of heaven; they sow not, nor reap, nor gather into storehouses; but your heavenly Father feeds them. Are ye not of greater value than they? Besides, which of you, by being anxious, can prolong his life one moment? And why are ye anxious about raiment? Mark the lilies of the field. How they grow! They neither labor nor spin; yet I tell you, that not even Solomon, in all his splendor, was arrayed like one of these. If, then, God so decorate the herb of the field (which flourishes today and tomorrow is used for fuel) how much more you, O ye

distrustful ones! Therefore be not anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, With what shall we be clothed? for all the nations seek after these things; and your heavenly Father knows that ye have need of them. But seek ye first his righteousness and kingdom; and all these things shall be added to you. Be not anxious about the morrow, for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for each day is its own trouble.”

Are we able to put our finger on things that make us anxious? Unquestionably our weightiest burdens are the ones we make for ourselves. The Apostle Paul says concerning our sometimes frantic efforts to gain more than our daily bread: “Piety with a sufficiency is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is evident that we are not able to carry any thing out; and having supplies of food and clothing, with those let us be content.” (1 Tim. 6:6-11 paraphrase). The worldly at our very elbow, father, brother, sister, friend, may prosper greatly; but if we walk close to God it is likely he will keep us poor, for few have ballast enough of character or experience to “know how to abound.” Phil. 4:12.

If we have not sufficient wisdom to decide the questions which confront us, let us ask for more wisdom. Sometimes the wisest way is simply to wait on the Lord for further indication of his will. Our greatest and worst mistakes have been made by taking some trying situation rashly into our own hands and deciding it at once. The Devil delights to get us into a dilemma and mocking, to tease us into choosing one of the two ways he points out, when the Lord’s way is possibly still a third and far better one.

The possibility or the probability or the fear of loss tends to cause us anxious thought. We fear to lose our friends, our money, our health, our influence, our prestige, our mental acumen, our youth. But have we not learned that loss does not always mean loss? We lose one thing only to find that after all it was not so important as we supposed. We lose one thing and find in its stead a keener appreciation of what we have left. We lose our life-in-self and find a life in more abundant measure. We lose the warm hearth-glow of the valley and gain the clear starlight of the mountain peak. We lose the warm hand-clasp of a friend and gain the unspeakable pleasures of the life of faith. Can we not trust God?

“He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matt. 10:39) “Oh rest in the Lord, wait patiently for him... And he will give thee thy heart desires.” (Psalm 37:7, 4.) Shall we worry over disappointments?

Delays make us anxious because of the element of uncertainty. But must we know all things before the time? Restraints tend to chafe us. We wanted this scheme to work out thus and so, and when we are unable to push it ahead we feel peeved. But if we left it with the Lord at the start and said “If the Lord will” where is our ground for worry?

Shelvings on a bed of sickness, off the main current of activity, arouse fear lest we become wholly useless. But perhaps there are some lessons for us to learn before we can be trusted with further activities. Or maybe we can do something “on the shelf” which we had not known to do before.

Others’ faults make us anxious for fear we may be the victim of their injustice. But shall we not remember that “The battle is not to the strong, nor the race to the swift?” “Our lives are hid with Christ in God” and cannot be injured.

Our failures tend to discourage us regarding the future, and make us fearful about the outcome. But we “have not a high priest unable to sympathize with our weaknesses.” The deadly mistake is to give up hope; and stop trying. It is more vanity than devotion if we wish to give up just because we are not able to make as prominent a showing as others or as we had hoped for ourselves. A mistake is not necessarily a fatal thing, unless we don’t get up and go on.

No undue care need be taken for that which is beyond our realm. We are promised the Holy Spirit, if we ask for it; and the Holy Spirit will guarantee the development of the fruits of the spirit. We are told that “If these things be in us richly and abound, so an abundant entrance shall be ministered unto us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. “He that hath begun the good work in you shall complete it unto the day of the Lord Jesus.”

Of course, brethren, the Hour of Temptation affects all that dwell on the earth, not just us. And it is much more complex than the issues of SELFISHNESS, DELUSION AND FEAR. But we have observed that most of the issues and trends in the world, sooner or later have their effect on the brethren—US.

Modernism, carelessness, temptation of affluence, liberty, coercion, etc. So we must be specially on the alert to resist the special influences of this time. We must keep our vision clear and our loyalty firm. To do this we have been given special help that other generations knew not of. Books, education, travel and a deep fellowship. Time and opportunities to correspond. And besides these we have all the great and precious promises and counsel of the Word of God.

What lies before the world and us are darker and more severe storm clouds. The dark night is settling in. The worst is yet to come. But if we are faithful, we will share the best as being yet to come, which lies just beyond; and it is not far off! I pray for the time when we will see it together.