

## **THE GOSPEL AGE HARVEST AFTER BROTHER RUSSELL'S DEATH**

(Br. Ted Smith, Seattle 1972 Symposium, part 2)

Late in the month of December I received a letter from Bro. Seklemian informing me that he and I had been assigned a symposium on the subject of the "Gospel Age Harvest," and that it had been suggested that the subject be divided into two parts—"The Harvest Under Bro. Russell's Ministry," and "The Harvest Since Brother Russell's Ministry." As Bro. Seklemian was on first it was mutually agreed that he would take "The Harvest Under Bro. Russell's Ministry," and I would take "The Harvest Since Bro. Russell's Ministry."

As I started in to thinking on my part, there immediately came to my mind a statement that our Pastor made in a Reprint article dated 12/15/1908, found on page 4293, par. 5, "But alas! a faithful 'View' from the Watch Tower reminds us of the fact that the harvest time is not alone for gathering the wheat from the fields, but a time also for threshing and winnowing it, for the separation of the chaff from the wheat, that the latter may be ready for the garner. We should, perhaps, expect that the remaining years of the harvest will be conspicuously marked in this manner. While we expect a large ingathering of ripened grain, we must also expect that the flail of trial and testing will fall heavily, swiftly and repeatedly upon the wheat, that it may be thoroughly threshed, and every grain may be thoroughly separated from the hull or chaff. Results may sometimes be very disappointing as we find ourselves mistaken in our estimates; as we find some fall whom we had no doubt would stand firmly with us to the end of the journey and enter the garner of the kingdom."

In preparation for my part of this symposium I went back and made a review of the entire chapter in Vol. III entitled THE WORK OF THE HARVEST, and I found this very same thought throughout the whole chapter. For instance on page 188 par. 1 the Pastor wrote, "Though coming out of Babylon is one step, and a long one, in the direction of complete overcoming, it is by no means the last one; and we should be careful to guard against a disposition to rest after every advance step of the way." There is another item worth quoting—it is on page 198, par. 1, "They are the wheat reaped or gathered out from amongst the tares, the wise virgins separated from the foolish. They have heard, and received the harvest truths and are rejoicing by faith in anticipation of the glory and blessing to follow their full union with the Lord. Hitherto they all have run well; but until he reach the end of his course, 'let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall!'" We could multiply quotations from this chapter, but our time is too limited.

After we had finished reviewing this chapter on the WORK OF THE HARVEST, we turned to the Reprint article, dated Nov. 1, 1916, page 5981, entitled THE HOUR OF TEMPTATION. It is significant that this article appeared right after our Pastor's death—this would mean that he prepared it just before he died. The Pastor saw certain conditions amongst the Bible Students that appalled him. If we take particular notice of

his observations and advice and warnings, and then note what happened amongst the Bible Students right after his death, and even up to our day, we have a marvelous opportunity to see just exactly what he had in mind, and learn important lessons.

We are going to quote a few pertinent statements from this article and then spend the remainder of our time in reviewing the history of Bible Students from the time our Pastor died. The first part of the article is filled with observations and advice. In the fourth paragraph of the article are these words, “We believe that a great crisis is upon the Bible Students; and that the sooner it is discerned, the more successfully it may be passed. It may mean divisions; but as the Apostle remarked, divisions are sometimes necessary that the approved course and the approved doctrines and the approved methods may be discerned, and that the true teachers be the more fully appreciated.—1 Cor. 11:18, 19.”

Then in the last two paragraphs, on Reprint page 5981 we read, “We have already alluded to the ambitious and selfish spirit in the world leading on to anarchy; and we have just pointed out how the same selfish, ambitious spirit is leading on to anarchy in the church. We foresee a time of trouble for the world, upon this score, and a time of trouble also for the church. Ours is the spirit of the Master, the spirit of loyalty to the truth, the spirit of the golden rule, the spirit of liberty and helpfulness, the spirit of fidelity to what we believe to be the truth. It is inexcusable for the church, possessed of this spirit, to continue under the domination of ambitious men (and sometimes ambitious women). If they have not been conducting their class affairs along proper lines, should they not begin at once? We believe that this is the time in which to set the house of the Lord in order.” We had to tear ourselves away from this article as there is so much to consider.

Before we delve into the history of the Bible Students after our Pastor’s death, we would like to say that I think we are supposed to go right on witnessing to the truth, and carry on the ministry. The Lord’s directions are constants—they do not change; we are to be upholders of the Truth to the very end of our lives. It matters not that our Pastor has experienced his change; it matters not that there is turmoil amongst the Lord’s people; we should go on with the pure truth regardless of what is going on otherwise.

And I would like to express a conclusion that I have come to as a result of this study—we should never think that because we have the truth and know what the ministry of the truth is, and know what the Lord wants us to do—we can now settle down and feel that all is well and it will be clear sailing to the end of our course. This is a most dangerous attitude to have. We must be constantly alert and watchful—to the very end of our Christian lives we are going to be tested as to our loyalty to the truth and as to our obedience to the principles of the truth in our personal lives, and in the Lord’s service.

Also, and this is something that is extremely vital to understand and face up to—we are going to be tested to the very end of our lives as to the way we view the teachings of

brethren in our midst—we are to be like the noble Bereans “who studied these things to see if they were so.” In other words, to be very precise and pointed in our statement, we must know that the Lord has selected a wise and faithful steward to give us our meat in due season, and we should act accordingly. There is no one on the face of this earth that we should permit to take the place of our Pastor.

But now let us consider what has happened since our Pastor’s death—the history of the Bible Students. And in our remarks no personal thrusts are intended. I think we will see that there have been severe Harvest testings—we could label these tests under the heading of HARVEST TRUTH VERSUS THE IDEAS OF CERTAIN LEADERS.

Let us start with the leadership of the Society after the Pastor died—what Harvest Truths were involved Vs. the ideas of the leaders of the Society? Let us note well that great claims were made of love for the Truth and that the ministry of our Pastor would be carried on faithfully. This was to throw the brethren off guard—this is the first lesson we can learn —WE SHOULD NEVER ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE THROWN OFF GUARD. NEVER!

It wasn’t very long after the Pastor’s death that the “channel” idea was foisted upon the Lord’s people—that the “channel” was the Society, therefore the brethren should follow the leadership of the Society. What was wrong with this idea?—it was false—the Society as such was never the channel. How did this idea seem a convenient one to win the brethren over to support the leadership of the Society? The answer is that our Pastor, in speaking of his work, in humility, he used the word Society, and not his own name. But the Pastor had 51% control of the Society, and HE WAS IN FACT THE SOCIETY! What did the Lord use to carry on the Harvest Work?—was it a lifeless legal organization? Of course not!—it was our Pastor. So the Pastor was the channel used of the Lord to “give us our meat in due season.”

The leadership of the Society came out with other deceptions that were directly contrary to the Harvest Truth. A Tabernacle Shadows book was brought out with many notes throughout the book; and in the back of the book were a number of changes explaining these notes. These changes were filled with ideas directly contrary to Harvest Truth—tentative justification was thrown into the scrap heap. The Gate to the Court was said to represent consecration, which, in effect, discarded the teaching that consecration is represented by the Door into the Holy. The teachings on the Levites were cut out entirely from the book, through the use of the notes.

Later on other teachings were brought out—one in particular to eliminate elders from the classes so the Society leadership could carry on without interference. Perhaps the crowning error contrary to the Harvest Truth was the teaching that because Adam sinned willfully therefore he was not redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus. And to add insult

to injury, the claim was made that Pastor Russell was the founder of Jehovah's Witnesses. We could go on and on, but this is sufficient to show that our Pastor knew what he was talking about when he said he believed there was a great crisis upon the Bible Students.

It is interesting to note that it is possible for brethren to make a good start to stay by the Truth and carry on the ministry of the truth, and then later on be switched off by unfaithful leaders. This is why we think it is wrong to be opposed to organization per se—there is nothing wrong with the idea of organizing to carry on any feature of the ministry of the truth. But we must be careful to see to it that we are watchful—each member of an organization must be watchful to resist any tendency to selfishness; and all must be watchful and not allow any member of an association to grasp some position in selfishness or promote a teaching that is contrary to the Truth we have.

We know of one association of brethren that started shortly after our Pastor's death—it started out well, but later certain errors crept in, promoted by a few leaders. One error was that the doctrines of the Divine Plan are not very important—only Christlikeness and holiness were important. An illustration was used to promote this idea and the illustration is deceptive, but easily overcome. We remember the Apostle said in Heb. 6:1, “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrines of Christ, let us go on unto perfection.” This sounds proper enough, but let us notice the catch, the twist, the brethren gave to this Scripture. They said “let us go on” and the thought they gave was that we are to leave the doctrines behind us! Is this the proper thought? No it is not. We do not leave the doctrines behind us; rather we build upon the doctrines—the doctrines are the foundation, and we go on to the higher doctrines by going upward. There is a vast difference between leaving something behind us, and building on something as a foundation and go upward. This false idea deceived a lot of brethren and is still deceiving them. The way to overcome this false idea is to remind ourselves that our Pastor, while stressing the importance of doctrines, and being thankful for them, he was always emphasizing that we must also grow in character, in Christlikeness. Our Pastor had a balance, the spirit of a sound mind; and we can see that false teachings are usually based upon an extreme in one direction or another. So the testing went on and on after our Pastor's death.

There was another extreme that was promoted after the Pastor's death—this was on the subject of types. In our Berean Bibles at the top of page 25 of the Berean Topical Index were these words: “A type must not be used to teach a doctrine, but merely to illustrate one that is already taught in plain terms.” That certainly is plain enough, isn't it? But what happened? A movement was started that placed great emphasis upon types. Upon the interpretation of certain types, or the making of certain types, some felt it was possible to judge all the Lord's people and place them in their proper categories—whether into the Bride Class, or the Great Company class or whatever suited the whim of the so-called judge. Should we fall for things like this? As wheat we are being tested and we are well instructed in matters of this kind. Are we not taught that we are “to judge

nothing before the time?” We are not constituted judges yet—we are not on the bench with divine wisdom—that will have to wait until we are with our Lord in glory.

There have been other ideas directly contrary to the Harvest Message. As we know Satan wants to do everything he can to stop the ministry of the Truth. He uses various deceptions to influence Truth people to give up the ministry of the truth in a public manner. “Don’t give out the Truth” is Satan’s idea, and he uses various errors to gain his point. But we can overcome all these deceptions by a careful study of the Truth in our Pastor’s writings.

I would like to touch upon another point that causes difficulty among the Lord’s people. This idea was used by the Society after our Pastor’s death and is still a powerful deception. As we know, the Society went wrong all along the line; but because the truth on a few subjects was circulated as a public witness, some thought it was all right to go along with the Society and cooperate in a public witness work. Let me give an illustration to show exactly what I have in mind. Supposing that an organization or a group of brethren or even an individual were giving out a booklet which gave the pure truth on such subjects as restitution, the trinity, the soul and hell. You might look the booklet over and say to yourself, “this is a good booklet—the truth on these four subjects is well presented.” But, should one stop here and give out a booklet of this kind without finding out first if the individual or the group or the organization is sound on other features of the Harvest Truth? For instance, supposing that it was found out that the individual or group or organization were believing that the high calling was all over and that there was no more spirit begetting. Would we think it proper to give out a booklet of this kind under such circumstances? No, I think it would be wrong to give out a booklet of this kind. Why? Because if an inquiring one were favorably impressed with such a booklet, what would he do? Would he not get in touch with the brethren who printed the booklet to get more information about the Bible? You know that is exactly what he would do. And would he not find in his mail box some other booklets that would confuse him on other vital subjects of the Truth? We all know that is what would happen. And so, even today, I think it is wrong to give out literature that is good in certain doctrines, but is printed by brethren who are unsound on other doctrines. I think situations of this kind are tests of our love of the truth, and tests of our true love for the brethren, or prospective brethren.

We are confronted today with several groups or organizations that are giving out pure truth on certain subjects but are teaching other things that are contrary to Present Truth. We are held responsible for any booklet we give out to the public. We are responsible for “side-effects” so to speak.

As to Harvest Work today, in the sense of giving out the precious message of Truth, I think there is a vital point in the chapter of Vol. III entitled THE WORK OF THE

HARVEST. This point is found on page 140, par. 1, “The wheat was not to be bundled: the grains were originally planted separate and independent, to associate only as one kind, under similar conditions.” The point is that we are individual grains of wheat. No grain of wheat need feel that he cannot be active unless he is in a bundle of some kind. We know there is no merit in wanting to act as an individual, and keep separate from all the rest of the brethren. But no individual grain of wheat need feel that he must not act as an individual and that it would be wrong to do so. The important thing is to have the proper desire of wanting to circulate the pure Truth and serve the Lord’s people in every way possible.

That reminds us of one of the principles brought to our attention in Vol. VI, page 254, par. 2, about individual liberty in the New Creation. Here is how it reads, “However, the point we wish to impress is the complete liberty of each individual to use his talents as he may be able, *as an evangelist*, whether by direct appointment of the Ecclesia of the New Creation or not... This absolute liberty of the individual conscience and talents, and the absence of any bondage or authority to restrict, is one of the marked features of the early Church which we do well to copy in spirit and in deed.”

(The following paragraph was omitted because of a lack of time.) Along this line, we have run across an idea that is a deterrent to some in their service to the Lord’s people. This is the saying, “Oh, brother so and so is breaking into print.” The important point is, what is contained in the print? If it is the truth and stated in the spirit of the truth, then there is nothing wrong with it. There is no essential difference between something said in personal conversation, or something said from the platform, or something on a tape recording, or something in print. Some seem to have the idea that if something is published by an organization, it is quite all right; but if it is from an individual it is to be rejected.

In closing I would like to quote a few lines from the very first Reprint at the bottom of page 46—written in the year 1879. “TRUE LIGHT is in harmony with all previous *light*, or truth. We should scrutinize closely everything presented as *light* which shines only as it is able to extinguish previous *light*. Remember too, that now (‘the evil day’) is not so much a time of attack and advance, as of watching and *withstanding* the attacks of error. ‘Take unto you the whole armor that you may be able to *withstand* in the *evil day!*’”

We note one sentence in particular—“Remember, too, that now (in the evil day) is not so much a time of attack and advance, as of watching and *withstanding* the attacks of error.”

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## THE WORD OF TRUTH

The Word of Truth is like a stained-glass window rare,  
We stand outside and gaze, but see no beauty there,  
No fair design, naught but confusion we behold;  
'Tis only from within the glory will unfold,  
And he who would drink in the rapture of the view  
Must climb the winding stair, the portal enter through.  
The sacred door of Truth's cathedral is most low,  
And all who fain would enter there the knee must bow  
In deep humility. But once inside, the light  
Of day streams through and makes each color heavenly bright,  
The Master's great design we see, our hands we raise  
In reverent ecstasy of wonder, love and praise!

—Poem Book, page 6—

It is not the deed we do  
Though the deed be ever so fair,  
But the love that the dear Lord looketh for,  
Hidden with holy care  
In the heart of the deed so fair.

The love is the priceless thing,  
The treasure our treasure must hold;  
Or ever the Lord will take the gift,  
Or tell the worth of the gold  
By the love that cannot be told.

—Poem Book, page 21—