

## Welcoming Address, Oct. 5, 1975

(The item below is the Welcoming Address by T. A. Smith given at the Little Northwest Fellowship Sunday, held in Bellingham, Oct. 5, 1975. The speakers on this occasion were Jerry Andrus of Salem, Ore., who started the program with a discourse on Character Development. Roger Foucher gave a talk on “Samuel.” Wilfred McNee gave a talk entitled the “Clay and the Spittle.” The final talk was by Brother Andrus and was entitled “The Wise and Foolish Virgins.” There were 75 in attendance.)

Dear Brethren, it is our pleasure in the Lord to welcome you again to our annual gathering. It seems strange to say that this is the 18th time that we have had our annual gathering, but such it is. The first one was in 1958. For our initial Scriptural thought we would like to quote from Psa. 133:1: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for the brethren to dwell together in unity!” How many times this has been quoted by Bible Students with emphatic understanding and with deep and holy emotion!

With very few exceptions, we could say that it is universally true that those who come into the Truth are elated with what they find in the Harvest Message. How deeply moved they are when they come to understand the divine plan—that our Creator has the best of intentions toward the human race; that his plan has two main parts—something exceedingly rich toward the followers of Jesus in the Gospel Age and something so desirable and satisfying toward the rest of the human family—restitution to all that was lost by Adam’s transgression back in the Garden of Eden.

Our state of mind when we first learn of God’s lovingkindness through Christ Jesus is well expressed by Rev. 4:2: “First Love.” “First Love”—what does this mean? If we think back to our heart sentiments, we know it means profound gratitude to our Heavenly Father and to our Beloved Redeemer, and an eternal resolve to be loyal and true.

What did we think about when we first came into the Truth, and when we gradually learned more and more of our Heavenly Father’s plan? Oh we thought of the love of the Father in sending His Son to be our Redeemer to rescue us from the sentence of death. We thought of our Redeemer’s unselfish love in being willing to come down to earth and become a man to redeem us and release us from the death sentence. We thought about our Father’s wisdom in permitting our first parents to transgress and thus the whole human family is put through a long hard schooling learning the awful results of sin, and this for their everlasting good. And we delighted in the provision for restitution for mankind. How deep was our thankfulness when we learned that the eternal torment doctrine was false and that this doctrine was based upon a misinterpretation of symbols.

We can remember how deeply we were moved by the understanding of the High Calling—that we were invited to walk in the footsteps of the Redeemer and that we had the imputation of his merit so we could be acceptable. How it drew us to the Father in holy love when we heard his words through the prophet, “Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.” Psalm 45:10, 11.

The words of Paul echoed this sentiment—“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” (2 Cor. 11:2) With deep gratitude and with appreciation of the high ideals of our espousal we have endeavored to cooperate with the requirements of this high calling to become the Bride of Christ, and be associated with him as the Second Eve to mother the regenerated human family, when Jesus becomes the Second Adam to the redeemed race.

How we have been deeply moved by the ideals outlined by the Pastor in his ministry in our behalf through his writings—the Six Volumes in particular and the hundreds of Reprint articles which been preserved for our use and study in the Heavenly Way.

We have realized that we have been greatly honored in being ambassadors for the Truth in this sin-darkened world, and this has heightened our sense of responsibility as “lights in the world” and the “salt of the earth” and that we want to avoid everything that would bring a reproach upon the ministry.

And have we not revelled in our understanding of the signs of the times and have offered up prayers of thankfulness to our Heavenly Father that has provided us with a wise and faithful Pastor who had a good measure of the Holy Spirit enabling him to grasp the significance of the many symbolic prophecies which describe the conditions around us in the world today. How full of meaning are the prophecies which use the expressions “dark clouds,” “waves lashing against the rocks,” “whirlwind,” “earthquakes,” and many other symbolic expressions.

Our hearts have been thrilled with the understanding that all the Truth we have in our possession is a positive sign that our Lord has indeed returned and is present and is “supping with us and we with him.” We are his prospective Bride and he is giving us a foretaste of the joys that we will experience more abundantly when we find ourselves with him in the heavenly state.

We could go on and on in this spirit—of expressing our thankfulness for being in the Lord’s special care and our fellowship and unity which flows from this special care of the Lord for us. But we want to touch briefly on another phase of our unity together.

True Christian unity is a unity of spirit—we look at things alike and work together harmoniously. Paul speaks of this in Eph. 4:3, “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

We have touched upon the harmony and joy we have together in the Truth. However the Truth is made up of a great many things, and our Pastor has expressed this so well in the title to one of his important articles for our instruction and edification. The title is worded this way—“Doctrines More or Less Important.” This article is only a half page long and is found on Reprint page 5284, dated Aug. 1, 1913. The thought we would get from the wording of the title is that while all Truth is important, yet there are some lines of truth that cannot be regarded as so clear that we can be dogmatic.

Let me illustrate what my understanding is along this line. There are dogmatic truths that are fundamental and we must not deviate from them if we are to remain balanced Christians. Let me name a few: The ransom, the doctrine of restitution, the high calling, justification, sanctification, glorification, presence of Christ, church’s part in the sin offering.

These are all in the “more important” category. But now what about some truths, some doctrines that are “less important”? What should be our mental attitude that would be regarded as balanced? It is this, that we cannot speak with the same assurance of full understanding. We hold to these doctrines, but we realize in our minds that we do not have full understanding, and therefore we cannot speak with the same assurance as we do on the more important doctrines.

Let us take the doctrine of the glorification of the church. This is an important doctrine but we cannot speak with assurance that we know exactly just when or just how the last members of the church will experience their glorification. This being the case we can have unity with one another if we refrain from expressing ourselves dogmatically on what we might think is reasonable as to the time and manner of the glorification of the last members of the church. It is an important element of our unity that we must feel free to express our thoughts and we will not be ostracized or be rudely criticized if we do express our thoughts that are in good harmony with the Plan itself. And it is also an element of unity that we must be satisfied to refrain from pushing our thoughts to the point of becoming a bore and not think that we must convince everyone of our views. This is emphasized by our Pastor in the article on Reprint page 3932 entitled “Love As Brethren.”

At this point I would like to mention that the Pastor is my Mentor. He was chosen by the Lord to give us our “meat in due season” and I pay special attention to what he said and the spirit he showed. He is my Pastor and this has a world of meaning to me.

I would like to elaborate a little more on the “less important” doctrines from the standpoint of the unity of spirit that we should have if we are to get along happily and harmoniously. Perhaps most of you remember the article written in 1916 entitled “The Harvest Is Not Ended.” Do you remember the language used by the Pastor regarding the Harvest and the Parallels? This is on Reprint page 5950. In the very first paragraph he said “our expectations must not be allowed to weigh anything against the facts.” The point we wish to bring specially to your attention is the language used. Would the Pastor use such language if he were discussing the “more important doctrines” such as the Ransom, Sin Offering and Second Presence?

I have many references from the Pastor’s pen on Chronology for example. In one place he even said that if one of the ten strings of our harp was broken (and the particular string he was referring to was chronology) we would not feel stranded but could go right on with full assurance of our love for God and continue in his service. In other words the Pastor did not express himself as feeling the same concern about the less important doctrines as he showed for the more important doctrines. This does not mean that we lose interest in chronology or prophecy, but we must be more relaxed, realizing that we walk by faith and our tranquility of mind and peace and our unity with one another is not fundamentally based upon chronology or prophecy. These are the less important doctrines and we need to use caution and self control. Our heads are different and we need to be patient with one another and not get excited or dogmatic over a viewpoint either for or against. There are some things we do not know for sure and unity of spirit means that we accept this as a fact and not go to extreme in any direction. I was impressed with the Pastor’s remark in the 1911 convention report on page 34, last paragraph, that we are not to worry if we cannot comprehend everything. We do not NEED to comprehend everything—we have enough that we do comprehend to keep us occupied in the Lord’s service and the work of sanctification. The Pastor said that “our faith and hopes would be equally clear and logical whether this age ends in October, 1914, or a century later.” (This is on Reprint page 4530, last par.) The special thought I am trying to bring to your attention is not on prophecy or chronology particularly, but the spirit the Pastor shows that is vital for us to have if we are to have unity of spirit. On the less important doctrines we must be humble and not think we must figure out a solution on everything.

As an illustration of this spirit I want to quote for you one of many that I have saved. This particular one is on Reprint page 5555, col. 2, par. 4. “At what time the Lord’s people will be taken beyond the veil the Lord has not fully indicated. But we have the assurance that when he shall appear, be manifested—when his epiphania shall occur—we shall be with him, we shall be like him and see him as he is. He will not begin his great work of establishing the kingdom until the church shall be with him.” Now notice these words—notice the spirit the Pastor had: “WE MAY NOT UNDERSTAND ALL THAT

THIS IMPLIES.” Let me repeat this: “WE MAY NOT UNDERSTAND ALL THAT THIS IMPLIES.” Then the Pastor went on: “Perhaps we may be with our Lord, in service on this side the veil for a while. We had not thought so; but we are simply willing that the Lord’s will shall be done, whatever it may be, and we are waiting for the indications of His providence.” So we see clearly that our Pastor did not stress this viewpoint, because this is one of the less important doctrines. I think it is important to our unity of spirit that we adopt the same attitude. What a pity it would be if we should make the mistake of putting too much emphasis on doctrines of less importance and partly destroy our unity of spirit in Christ, in the spirit of the Truth!

There seems to be a tendency today to become quite agitated over such questions as to whether there are any spirit-begotten ones in Babylon, and also whether there is to be a combination of church and state to oppose the truth work. To me these are among the many less important doctrines and I for one think unity of spirit means that we should grant one another liberty of thought and liberty of expression and not try to pressure one another to accept one viewpoint only. I don’t think our fellowship, our unity is based upon these lesser important doctrines, and we can well afford to grant liberty to one another and not become agitated one way or the other.

It is interesting to be aware of the fact that we can adopt differences of viewpoint right from our Pastor’s own writings. Our Pastor did a lot of reasoning on many of the lesser important doctrines.

In justice to myself, I want to stress the point that what I have said is not intended to express doubt about our understanding of prophecy or chronology. I have confidence in everything the Pastor had confidence in. My remarks are primarily to bring to your attention the Pastor’s own spirit regarding the lesser important doctrines. That is all I have in mind. With these thoughts we now turn the meeting over to our good chairman and we will look forward to blessings from the ministry of the brethren on the program.