

## TRIALS, EXTREMES AND DEVICES

*STUDY- Ted Smith*

Trials, Extremes and ~ is the title of a series of studies. This may sound strange—these three words together, as a subject. But as we proceed, we may agree that these words are all related, because they are all pertaining to another subject, viz., character development.

Character development is dependent upon our working in harmony with God's will concerning us. We are required to respond favorably to the TRIALS our Heavenly Father brings upon us to test us and to train us. Then, too, we have EXTREMES in our own personality structure. By carefully looking into the mirror of God's Word, and that continually, we must honestly face the facts of our individual personality traits. And where there are EXTREMES we must correct and overcome these EXTREMES, which at times, require rigorous treatment. This is absolutely necessary in the process of character development. And last, but not least, we are confronted with the "DEVICES" of Satan which, if possible, would deceive the very elect. (# 2 Corinthians 2:11; # Matthew 24:24) But thank God for the assurance that we are not ignorant of his "DEVICES" and therefore we are not deceived by them, but can benefit in our character development by overcoming his "DEVICES". We do have the important task of resisting Satan So he will "flee from us," leaving us undeceived. (# James 4:7)

Actually there are three living personalities involved. First, God who gives us instructions and TRIALS for our good. Second, Satan who works contrary to God, in an endeavor to deceive us and trap us and destroy us, if he can. And third, each individual Christian who is in between these two—God and Satan. Each individual Christian is given all possible aid and love and protection from God. Each individual Christian must deal rigorously with any EXTREMES in his personality make up; and he must cooperate with God in every way—he must be obedient to all the exhortations; he must take in all the knowledge he can (doctrines of the Divine Plan and prophecy); he must make the promises of God his very life; and lastly, but very importantly, he must be wide awake to the dangers from Satan, the enemy of God and ourselves, and resist Satan to the very end of life.

As we endeavor, in this present STUDY (I) to consider the individual aspects: TRIALS and tests from God, EXTREMES in our personality make up, and Satan's "DEVICES", we may find at

times that all three may be intertwined with one another—at least two and possibly all three.

Our present STUDY (I) will be concerned with two tests that have confronted the Lord's people since our Pastor's death back in 1916. Both of these tests have to do with the Harvest Message. Test number one is whether we recognize the individual used of the Lord to give us the Harvest Message. Test number two is how we act if we do recognize the individual used of the Lord to give us the Harvest Message.

The setting for the first test is fairly clear as it is plainly stated in # Matthew 24:45 to 47 and in # Luke 12:42- 44 that the Lord at his return would choose an individual, wise and faithful, and he would be chief steward over all the Lord's goods, to give us our meat in due season, and he would have associated with him "fellow servants."

There can be no question that a certain individual has done certain things that give us confidence that we can truly apply to him the title of "that wise and faithful servant." From his ministry we have in our possession six Studies in the Scriptures, Tabernacle Shadows, seven large volumes of Reprints to say nothing of his other writings. Surely these have been "meat in due season" to us. In addition to this stewardship, this individual had charge of all the Lord's work in the supervision of a worldwide ministry to the Lord's People; and the same could be said concerning the witness of the truth to the public. He was indeed "chief steward over all the Lord's goods" and he did have "fellow- servants."

The test is readily met with many and there has been no problem in their minds and hearts. But Satan has his "DEVICES" and individual brethren have their personality EXTREMES, So some have had difficulty.

For instance Satan might suggest to the minds of some, when they consider # Ephesians 4:11, that God has chosen some to be pastors and some to be teachers. And if someone has an EXTREME development of ego in his personality make up, he could believe that he was sufficiently qualified to interpret the Scriptures for himself and for others. He would feel that he was superior in understanding ability and would proceed to point out certain things in the Pastor's writings that, to his mind were flaws. The reason he would do this and could do this is because his ego was fooling him. His pride would be unbalanced and he would be undeveloped in faith and humility. Not being properly developed in the spirit of the

Truth, he would be blind to the true scriptural harmonizations found in our Pastor's writings. It requires the proper spirit to appreciate the Truth. So Satan's "DEVICE" would sway the minds of those who are troubled with an EXTREME of ego, and who are not developing in the holy spirit of truth as they should.

Or take another example: there are many scriptures concerning "love of the brethren," and these scriptures are being used today as powerful arguments to sway the Lord's people to accept teachers who are telling us that our Pastor was wrong in his teachings on a number of important doctrines and on prophecy. Brethren who are troubled with an EXTREME in their character make up, in being careless in study or who do not take a sufficient interest in study, are vulnerable to these misapplications of scripture.

If we "study" we are fortified from God's word against wrong applications of scriptures on "love of the brethren." For instance Paul tells us in # Romans 16:17 that we are to "mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them." Brethren who are careless in study seem to pass up scriptures of this kind, and think that their social love of the brethren should take precedence over the wisdom from above which is "first pure, and then peaceable." (# James 3:17) And another scripture: "But continue thou the things which thou has learned and has been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them." (# 2 Timothy 3:14) It should cause us serious thought to consider the words of Jesus in # John 7:17, "If any man will do his (God's) will, he shall know of the doctrine." If one is losing his understanding of the doctrines, this might mean that he was not doing God's will sufficiently.

The second test is very peculiar and is in the very opposite direction. Failure to meet this test started right after our Pastor's death, and has continued up to this very day. One of the marks of this failure to meet this test properly is characterized by an expression that is used by some, viz. "If the Pastor didn't write it, then God did not intend us to understand it or consider it." It might be difficult, if not impossible to pinpoint the precise personality trait that leads to this EXTREME. But in any case, it is easily countered with facts and scripture.

Perhaps the most pointed scripture is # Galatians 6:6, "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things." There is an interesting comment on this text in Vol. VI, page 263 which reads as follows: "This Scripture, in accord with all the others, shows us that God designed to instruct his

people by means of each other; and that even the humblest of his flock shall think for himself and thus develop an individual faith as well as an individual character. Alas, that this important matter is so generally overlooked amongst those who name the name of Christ! This Scripture recognizes teacher and pupils; but the pupils are to feel free to communicate, to make known to the teachers any and every matter coming to their notice and seeming to bear upon the subject discussed—not as desiring to be teacher but as an intelligent student to an elder brother student. They are not to be machines, nor to be afraid to communicate; but by asking questions, calling attention to what seems to them to be misapplications of Scriptures or what not, they are to do their part in keeping the body of Christ and his teachings pure—they are thus to be critics; and instead of being discouraged from doing this, and instead of being told that they must not criticize the teacher or call in question his expositions, they are, on the contrary, urged to communicate, to criticize."

Another interesting quote is found on reprint page 5562 par. 8, "Along the lines of this teaching, there is no room for clericalism. Rather, as the Apostle says, 'Those who are taught in the Word should communicate with those who teach in all good things,' telling them of any blessings received or of any clearer views of the Word of God which have come to them." How delightful and satisfying are our Pastor's comments!

We can all find instances of this procedure in the reprints. For example we can all remember Bro. Barton's presentation on "The Binding of the Strong Man," which is found on reprint page 4695. This was in the form of a letter and was entitled THIS LOOKS REASONABLE. Again Bro. Barton presented his views in the form of a letter and this is found on reprint page 5865 and is entitled EXPECTING A PERSONAL ANTI- CHRIST. On page 5867 we find our Pastor's comment in five paragraphs headed THE EDITOR'S VIEW IS DIFFERENT. Our Pastor followed the scriptural instructions in spirit, and in the very letter as well. The Mamma comment for March 5th is very interesting too, "Things of any virtue or value, things in any degree praiseworthy—the noble words or noble deeds or noble sentiments of anybody—we may safely meditate upon, and as a consequence find ourselves growing toward those ideals upon which our minds, our new natures, thus feed."

There is another scripture that comes to mind—# 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." So we may feel free to study God's Word—it is ours and is profitable for many things, as the Apostle tells us.

We are all members of the same Body, and we can be a blessing to one another in the reverent study of our Heavenly Father's Word.

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 1, 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 combativeness. 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 combativeness, 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 An 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 subjects 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.