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**"MANY SHALL BE PURIFIED AND MADE WHITE
AND TRIED."**

DEAR BROTHER RUSSELL: – Just a few lines to let you know that we are well. I was sorry that I was unable to be present with you at the Convention, but was with you in spirit. That very same Sunday, somehow, we seemed to have a special blessing in our afternoon meeting, and I feel sure that all the little gatherings were remembered by the brethren who were present at Council Bluffs: the spirit of that Convention overflowed and reached us who were obliged to stay at home.

I have just received a letter from one of the brethren at _____ stating that they have had a severe shaking up and sifting, at which I am not altogether surprised, considering the circumstances in the case.

The Church of this place sends love, and please accept much love from Sister Thorn and myself.

Your Brother in Christ,

W. J. THORN.

IN REPLY: – We are glad to know that the influence of the Convention was far-reaching. You are quite right in supposing that the dear flock of the Lord in every place was feelingly remembered by the company there assembled. The fellowship of spirit which you mention, and the attendant blessing, is undoubtedly a part of the divine provision for the Lord's flock: where our love and sympathy go out toward the fellow-members of the body of Christ, it is sure to bring us nearer to our great Head, and thus to bring us increased blessing of fellowship with him.

Respecting the "Sifting" at _____: It should not surprise us to hear of "siftings" in every direction. That which we have reiterated for the last eighteen years becomes daily more strikingly manifest; *viz.*, that the harvest-time of the Gospel age, which began in the Autumn of 1874, and will end with the Autumn of 1914, is to be not only a period of great spiritual enlightenment and refreshment to some, but also a period of sifting and testing to the same class. And it is but reasonable to expect such sifting to follow such blessing: for where much light is given much responsibility follows. It was just so in the "harvest" of the Jewish age; the blessings of the new dispensation, and the light from the Lord's presence (subsequently represented in his apostles), were accompanied with trials, siftings, testings, proportionate to the blessings then enjoyed.

Since the Lord has granted to us so clear a knowledge of his own character and plan, and granted us to [R2385 : page 334] see the wonderful harmony and beauty of the word of his grace, it is but reasonable that he should look for the *spirit* of the truth in those who have become blessed with so clear an appreciation of its *letter*. Judged from this standpoint, "What manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy living and godliness?" It would appear, too, that these siftings specially take hold of those who have been for some time enlightened, and do not as readily affect the beginners, altho when a root of bitterness springs up its defiling influence may affect the beginners also.

It would seem as tho worldly minds have reached certain standards respecting conduct in life which are helpful, and that while the standard of the fully developed children of God, fully enlightened by his Word, should be a still higher one, *viz.*, the "perfect law of liberty," yet if the advanced Christian has not developed, or if he subsequently loses the spirit of love, which is the very essence of the truth, he is in a worse condition, in some respects, than those who have never looked into the perfect law of liberty; – for, losing the element of *fear*, and not proportionately developing the spirit of *love*, he is

much more likely to go to the extremes of inconsistency than are those who have enjoyed the grace of divine truth in a lesser degree. Hence, while knowledge is a great blessing, and a great power, an absolute essential to the Lord's people in the present time to enable them to "stand," it is also a great responsibility.

God's object in furnishing his people "present truth," and all truth, is to develop in them faith, and all the various fruits of the spirit, which unitedly come under the name Love. Whoever, therefore, is blessed by the knowledge of the truth, and fails to cultivate in himself the fruits of the spirit, Love, fails utterly to realize [R2386 : page 334] the Lord's design in his call and in bringing him to the light of present truth. Our Master summarized this whole matter, respecting the object of giving the truth, in his prayer to the Father, "*Sanctify* them through thy truth." Where the truth has been received, and has been held in unrighteousness, and has not produced sanctification of life, it has been received in vain; and the only thing to be expected is that the Lord, after a reasonable trial, will cast out of the light, out of the present truth, out of the fellowship with those who are in the light, all who have any other spirit than the spirit of the truth, Love, – the law and mainspring of the new life in Christ. "For if any man have not the spirit of Christ [the spirit of love], he is none of his."

The Apostle mentions just such a condition as prevailing in the Church at Corinth, and its attendant "sifting." He first points out to them (1 Cor. 1:10) that there *should be* no divisions, but that they should "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." There is one line of judgment which should govern all who have the Lord's Word and spirit; *viz.*, the letter and spirit of the truth. All should be familiar with the teachings of the divine Word, or if not familiar should be teachable, and amenable to it; and all having the spirit of love, the spirit of the truth, will be so: such, while contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, will not be contentious along other lines, but patient, forbearing and meek – not

envious, not heady, not high-minded, not boastful, not slanderers and backbiters.

But gradually the Apostle leads his readers onward and points out to them their low spiritual condition (1 Cor. 3:3), as evidenced by the facts which he cites, saying, "There is amongst you envying and strife and divisions" (a party spirit, dividing themselves under human leadership rather than uniting themselves under Christ, the true and only head). Let it be noted that the Apostle does not accuse the Church at Corinth of what would be termed gross worldly sins, murder, theft, blasphemy, etc., but of the more refined evidences of a wrong condition of heart – a lack of the spirit of love: And yet, as our Lord pointed out, anger, hatred and malice are *murder in the heart*. Proceeding further, however, he shows that not all of them, but only a part, are in this seriously wrong condition of heart. He adds, therefore (11:18), "I hear that there be divisions amongst you, and I believe it respecting part of you; for there must be also parties amongst you, *that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.*"

Likewise the siftings in progress during this harvest time are not only to separate those whom the Lord disapproves, but are also to make manifest those whom the Lord does approve: and in no way can this matter be more clearly and distinctly noted than in respect to the difference of spirit manifested where there is a division, a sifting, in progress. We do not refer particularly to the difficulty which you mention, of which we have no other knowledge as yet: we are dealing merely with general principles, which seem applicable in every such case. Those who have not yet had a sifting have had special opportunities to grow strong in the knowledge of the truth and in the spirit of it, and when their sifting does come, it probably will be severe in proportion to the blessings previously enjoyed.

We urge, therefore, upon all of the Lord's people, everywhere, that they set their own hearts in order, purging out all the leaven of malice, envy, strife, hatred, evil speaking (incipient *murder*), and fill

every corner and interstice of their nature, so far as possible, with the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of the truth, Love: and that when siftings or separations shall come, they take heed and be not deceived by the Adversary, who always will attempt to put darkness for light, and will [R2386 : page 335] not hesitate at misrepresentations, back-biting, evil speaking, slander, etc. And as the Adversary does not hesitate at these, neither do those who become, either knowingly or unknowingly, his agents and tools. Such seem to lose not only their self-respect and sense of propriety and justice and love of truth (which even the world and nominal Christians would have), but in their bitterness of spirit seem to give full testimony respecting which spirit it is that animates them. In these trials and siftings we may be sure that only the one class will come off victors, *viz.*, those who abide under the shadow of the Almighty, trusting in the precious blood, and seeking in all things to be conformed to the image of the Lord, not only in their doctrines, but also in the acts of daily life, and in their words and thoughts. Remember the words of the Apostle Peter, respecting the necessity for putting on the graces of the spirit: – "If ye do these things ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

The duty of the faithful in every case is the same: to hold up the light – to manifest the spirit of the truth and to *refuse* to tolerate the evil – to reprove it by the Word of the Lord and in a spirit of love and gentle firmness. The sooner all who love evil – anger, malice, hatred, etc. – depart from those who delight to speak the truth in love, the better. As the Apostle suggests of this class – "They went out from us, because they were not all of us." Let not those who love the truth and have its spirit of love depart; but let them forget not the assembling of themselves together, and so much the more as they see the Day drawing on.

But nothing in the foregoing should be understood to advise the *forcing* of a breach, or carelessness as to who may "stumble."

Quite the contrary, true love of the brethren means patience, long suffering, gentleness, kindness, – willingness to yield to them and accommodate them in anything non-essential – in anything not opposed to the letter or spirit of the truth. For love and faithfulness to God alone takes precedence to love and faithfulness to the brethren. Each, therefore should not only sacrifice his own non-essential preferences (to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace), but more: the Apostle declares the proper measure of this love is willingness to "lay down our lives for the brethren."

Only after we have thus done *all in our power* to preserve unity along Scriptural lines and a rupture is unavoidable, may we regard it as a providential sifting from which good will result. And each should previously carefully and prayerfully scrutinize his own heart and conduct to make sure that not selfishness and vainglory are ruling him, but only love. And when a rupture does occur, each should be careful to avoid any unkind words or acts and looks, which later on might be barriers to hinder the return of any who, seeing the error of their way, might subsequently desire to return to holy fellowship. And such returning ones should be most heartily and joyfully received; – "pulling them out of the fire," etc.

These "siftings" seem to emphasize the Master's words, – "Take heed that no man take thy crown." Our joy at seeing some come into the light of present truth is necessarily modified by the thought that they are probably taking the places in trial of some who have been weighed in the balances and found wanting. "Let us fear," as the Apostle suggests, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it by losing either the *faith* or the *spirit* of the truth: for the loss of either one means soon or later the loss also of the other.
