

## SABBATH THOUGHT 2023-01-14—DIVIDED WE FALL

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Here in the USA, the Republicans recently spent a week deciding who would become the Speaker of the House of Representatives. It was rife with not only disagreements and infighting, but an embarrassing public display of anger and conflict. It was a reflection and continuation of intraparty divisions that have unashamedly been going on for the last decade or so.

While opposing ideals have been around since the formation of this government, two things have changed: 1) they are no longer argued privately—outside of the media; and, 2) they are no longer philosophical and political differences that are hotly debated—they have devolved into character assassinations fueled by raw anger or hatred.

Such things normally occur between differing political parties, but there is just as much of this going on within supposedly politically ideologically similar groups. No one is willing to rationally debate the issues and they do not have even a modicum of respect for others. As soon as there is a disagreement, what do they do? They separate themselves and form another group, such as the Freedom Caucus, et al, that is at cross-purposes with their former associations.

At this point, if this sounds like a mirror of many of the organized Churches of God (CoG) today, you would be correct. Have you ever considered that many of the organized church groups in modern times, including Worldwide Church of God, was formed because of disputes? Admittedly, some were over salvational doctrinal differences, but the fact that many arose out of unresolved offenses is shameful, especially when they are *not* related to salvational beliefs.

While government political infighting was mostly hidden from the public until the last fifteen years or so, the CoGs have been doing this for decades. Worst of all, those who are responsible for the divisions (on both sides), typically recruit brethren to support and establish their cause. Unresolved offenses between those who have been called to be God's eternal children have seemingly become a way of life. Shame on us!

Solomon wrote that a “soft answer turns away wrath” (Prov. 15:1). However, does that really work these days? Even among the saints? Why do we allow anger to separate us from one another? Why do divisions continue to happen without reconciliation? I have heard many of the groups claim that there are God's people in the other organizations but I have never, not once, seen any of them reconcile and join together.

I have been thinking about eternity recently. It brought to mind some questions that have everything to do with offenses and, I hope, prompt us to seriously think about how critical it is to reconcile with others in this life. Considering that eternity is a very...very long time, what is required for everyone to perfectly and always peaceably coexist with billions of other beings? Do you imagine that there will NEVER be any differences—NONE

whatsoever? How is it possible for the children of God be “more” perfect than angels—some of whom rebelled? What makes us unique in the sense of being incapable of sinning? What is it about our character, heart, and mind that makes us better as spirit beings? Will we always be in agreement with *everyone* and *everything* in the Kingdom? What will prevent our hearts from being moved to anger by anyone or anything during that eternal existence?

How can anyone live a never-ending peaceable life if they are easily provoked in this life? People literally **end** relationships with family, friends, and brethren over small matters including divergent opinions, disparate (non-salvational) beliefs, who is or is not in control, who is or is not ordained, who is or is not allowed to speak, eating out on the Sabbath, etc. Again, I ask: can you imagine coexisting perfectly in love and humility with billions of other beings forever and ever if we cannot get along in this life?

Satan is a perfect example. At one time, he was one of the cherubim<sup>1</sup> who covered the throne of the Most High God. And he was *perfect in every way*. And that is according to GOD. However, Satan decided at one point he wanted to rule over all the angels:

ISAIAH 14:13-14 For you have said in your heart, ‘I will ascend *into* the heavens, **I will exalt my throne above the stars of God**; I will also sit upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north. 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High.’

He desired to have his throne next to God. He wanted to “sit upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north”—the possible location of God’s throne upon Mount Zion<sup>2</sup>. Satan wanted to be like the Most High by having dominion over the angelic heavenly host. When the answer he received was “no,” he became filled with hatred and turned the heavens upside down in rebellion.

Scripture tells us that such things will never happen in the future Kingdom<sup>3</sup>. But what is it that will ensure NO ONE will ever get angry and rebel? What Satan did is **no different** than what is happening over and over again among God’s children today. A disagreement is quickly followed by brethren choosing sides. The results are an exodus and splintering of the organization. If this continues in this life, how is it possible that it will never happen throughout eternity when we are made spirit beings? Will God use mind-control to prevent rebellion? Will God install an anger blocker into our hearts? ***Can anyone seriously believe that the solution to offenses between us now will only occur after we are given eternal life?***

If we, today, are truly begotten of God by His Holy Spirit and yet refuse to reconcile offenses, how can we believe that we will even be *in* the Kingdom? There are three very important questions to ask ourselves. What is it that will make us more perfect than the

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<sup>1</sup> Ezek. 28:14-16.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 48:2.

<sup>3</sup> Isa. 9:7.

angels who were perfect and, yet, still rebelled; how do we obtain that greater perfection; and how do we can we know that we have it? The answer to the first question is:

COLOSSIANS 3:14 And above all these things **put on [agape] love, which is the bond of perfection.**

Agape love is the bond of **perfection**. The really interesting point is that perfection happens when there is a bond of agape love between us and God the Father and Jesus Christ. The Greek word for *bond* means to be jointly tied together in the way a ligament connects two bones so they work in concert with each other. A ligament is extremely hard to break; likewise, a perfect bond of agape love between us and God must be strong enough to never break. How strong is agape love in us? Will it last for eternity? Is it possible to stretch it to the breaking point as in the case of Satan?

I urge everyone to read 1 John 4:7-21 because it reminds us that the work of God is to fill us with His agape love. Also notice what Paul said immediately following his beautiful prose on what love is and is not: "... when that which is perfect has come." (1 Cor. 13:10). What is the perfection that comes? He tells us in verses 1-9 that it is agape love. So how do we obtain the perfection of agape love? It is from God alone:

1 JOHN 4:7-8, 12 Beloved, we should love one another because **love is from God**; and **everyone who loves has been begotten by God**, and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God because God is love. ... 12 No one has seen God at any time. Yet, **if we love** one another, God dwells in us, and **His own love is perfected in us.**

Agape love is from God, but it begins with a sincere desire to serve and obey God, not our own selfish interests. Keeping God's Law is the beginning of agape love and the way we are perfected in it.

1 JOHN 2:5 On the other hand, **if anyone is keeping His Word, truly in this one the love of God is being perfected.** By this *means* we know that we are in Him.

1 TIMOTHY 1:5 Now **the purpose of the commandment is love out of a pure heart**, and a good conscience, and genuine faith;

Finally, how do we know if we are growing in that bond of agape love? What is the test of it? How we handle offenses! Are we able to forgive—from the heart—those who offend us? Do we have the humility to sincerely repent to those we offend? Above all, do we strive with all our being to not be offended or become angry? Offenses certainly and frequently occur—they continue to be the single most common problem in the Body of Christ. What are people called who have an unresolved offense between them? Enemies. Whenever there is an unwillingness to reconcile with someone, they become an enemy. What is the truest test of agape love in us?

MATTHEW 5:44, 48 But I say to you, **love your enemies**, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you

and persecute you, ... 48 Therefore, **you shall be perfect**, even as your Father Who *is* in heaven is perfect.”

Having sincere agape love for an enemy is the perfection of God the Father and Jesus Christ. They are perfect because they loved us all when we were enemies. And They proved it—Jesus Christ died for the enemies of God. He did not die for a friend—there were none. Life is hard and rife with offenses. We are to be vessels of God’s agape love, the only way to deal with an offense. How hard is it to repent to, or forgive, others? God does not ask us to DIE for our enemies, only love them. What prevents us from doing that? Fear? Pride? An angry heart? Jealousies over the disparities of life—gifts, intelligence, wealth, possessions, positions, or afflictions? If we, in this physical life, refuse to attempt to reconcile EVERY offense, can we really expect to live peaceably for all eternity with billions of people, many of whom are radically different from ourselves? Our personalities are as divergent as the two halves of our brains.

Please brethren, I am begging everyone to seriously ponder all these questions. Unresolved offenses are a grave matter. Jesus Christ demands that we try to resolve them even before we bring our offerings to **God**—it is that important:

**MATTHEW 5:22-24 But I say to you, everyone who is angry with his brother without cause shall be subject to judgment. ... 23 For this reason, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 Leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.**

At the resurrection, there will not be a lobotomy or heart transplant that makes us perfect. If we are devoid of agape love now, then our spiritual eternity is at risk. If we refuse to reconcile simple offenses with others who are begotten by God and have the mind of Jesus Christ, then what would eternity be other than unending divisions and strife? How is it that anyone can partake of the Passover each year if there are unresolved offenses? Is that not ignoring Matthew 5:24 as well as the sacrifice of Jesus Christ? Consider that God can withhold the sacrifice of Jesus Christ from any one of us if we do not try to resolve offenses between us:

**LUKE 6:37 And do not judge *others*, so that you yourself will not be judged in any way. Do not condemn *others*, so that you will not be condemned in any way. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven.**

Brethren, do not let unresolved offenses of today mar the joy of the resurrection with grief if any one of us is absent on that day.

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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