

SABBATH THOUGHT 2023-02-11—LOST FRIENDSHIPS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Death is a part of this physical existence. Several friends in high school died way too young. One of my best friends, Scott, was someone who always knew what he wanted to do in life. Shortly after high school, I drove with our circle of friends down to College Station, TX where we participated in his wedding to a beautiful young woman who was the love of his life. After college, he followed his dream and joined the Air Force. A couple of years later, I found out that the aircraft he was flying in disappeared off the coast of Seattle. Nothing was found—not even wreckage. I could relate other stories of car accidents, diving accidents, breast cancer, suicides, etc. While all of these deaths were grievous, most had one thing in common—they were friends who knew love in this life and gave love in return.

The same is true for brethren I have known over the years who have died of various illnesses, sicknesses, and disease. Again, those friends were part of a circle of love that was given and received.

Sadly, I have witnessed and experienced something over the decades that is worse than losing friends to death—I am talking about the loss of friendships with brethren who separated from church organizations. To this day, it baffles me how close friendships within the Body of Christ are suddenly ended when someone leaves an organization. What is that all about? I have both witnessed and experienced it several times and find it one of the great sorrows of this life.

Some made the personal decision to leave an organization while others were forced out. When brethren leave an organization, it is many times caused by—or results in—unreconciled offenses. But I am not talking about an offense that originated between friends. I am referring to offenses that are with the minister or organization! I am speaking about those left an organization and were subsequently rejected by friends who had nothing to do with the **reasons** why they left. Who can claim to be friends with someone but so easily discards that friendship because the person no longer “belongs” to the same organization or because the leader of an organization disfellowships them? I have seen this occur between people who were friends for decades. This is a serious issue within the Body of Christ.

I am guessing that some may think that there must be serious sins that caused those separations from a group. Perhaps, but does that matter? Even if there are sins involved, are we not to still be there for a FRIEND??

1 JOHN 4:20 If anyone says, “I love God,” and **hates his brother, he is a liar.** For if he does not love his brother whom he has seen, how is he able to love God Whom he has not seen?

GALATIANS 6:2 **Bear one another’s burdens,** and so fulfill the law of Christ.

JAMES 5:20 Let him know that he who **brings back a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death**, and shall cover a multitude of sins.

This reminds me of the mother of John and James who asked Jesus to give them high positions in the Kingdom. The story is in Matthew 20:20-24. It caused great “indignation” with the other disciples who were jealous and wanted the positions for themselves. Was that not a serious matter that arose between them? And, yet, they forgave one another. There was also a disagreement between Paul and Mark as well as Paul and Peter. Scripture also reveals that they later reconciled. Why is that so hard today?

We must stand firmly on those things that God has revealed to us as truth because “everything that *is* not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). On the other hand, who is willing to claim they know all truth unto salvation? Who is willing to claim they keep the commandments of God without sin? Who keeps the Sabbath perfectly? Judgment belongs to Jesus Christ, not us. Thank God for that because some have publicly condemned to the lake of fire some who left their organization. Such words should never come out of the lips of those who are flesh and blood, much less those of the Body of Christ. There is a warning from God against that:

MATTHEW 7:1-5 **“Do not condemn others, so that you yourself will not be condemned; 2 For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you mete out, it shall be measured again to you. 3** Now why do you look at the sliver that *is* in your brother’s eye, but you do not perceive the beam in your *own* eye? 4 Or how will you say to your brother, ‘Allow *me* to remove the sliver from your eye’; and behold, the beam *is* in your *own* eye? 5 *You* hypocrite, first cast out the beam from your *own* eye, and then you shall see clearly to remove the sliver from your brother’s eye.

To reject a friend who is begotten of God, even if there are differences, is not something I can rationalize. The apostles had issues and forgave one another. Whatever happened to reconciliation? Most of the time it seems to be regarded as more of a suggestion than a biblical commandment of Jesus Christ.

Friendships that are lost when someone turns in their membership card are something I have only seen happen within organized church groups. No one “unfriends” someone who moves to a different city, changes schools, or takes a different job even if they left because of disagreements with an employer. On occasion, a relationship might dwindle over time because of lack of contact but who rejects a friendship BECAUSE they change jobs due to problems with a boss? Friendships should never be sacrificed on the altar of loyalty to a group and certainly are not defined by membership to a specific organization.

Can agape love be growing in those who cast away a friendship so easily? If there is not enough agape love to maintain a friendship, can there be agape love for our enemies¹?

¹ Matt. 5:44.

Loving our enemies is the sincerest test of God's agape love working in us. Does God declare that we are to have agape love for everyone except for those who are not members of our fellowship group? I cannot think of ANY reason to abandon a friendship especially with someone in the Body of Christ. As John said, "... The one who **does not love his brother is dwelling in death.**" (1 John 3:14). That should frighten some sense into us.

I cannot count how many times someone confided in me that they disagree on this or that point with a minister. I would be not surprised if you have heard such things or, maybe, even said them. But a friendship is not harmed when a friend privately tells us that he or she disagrees with the minister or organization. Apparently, it is only when someone actually **leaves** the group that it is grounds for removing them from our book of friends. Discarding friendships because someone leaves an organization is a reflection of a heart condition.

Something else happens when friends are rejected—people begin to gossip and tell stories behind the backs of the person that was their friend. The most appalling things are spoken to others that would never be said in front of the person. Instead, why not call and talk with the person—privately. There is no agape love in gossip.

This is worse than how some treat Catholics or Protestants or Muslims. Are they not blinded by God? **We were all like them** in that sense at one time. Did you know there are some Protestants Christians who have literally shed blood for their beliefs? The stories abound in Pakistan, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, and many other places of those who were tortured, imprisoned, murdered, and enslaved and, yet, they still have love in their hearts to forgive their abusers and faith to continue proclaiming the gospel. Is there anyone you know that has endured such things and continued to love and forgive their tormentors? How can they be condemned by anyone in the churches of God, especially since we ourselves have never bled for Christ? So, how is it that we treat friends worse than those who are blinded? Friends that leave an organization are rejected, cast away, ridiculed, and condemned.

These days I see too many children of God with hard hearts. I have never lost a friendship with people at work or neighbors even if we seriously disagreed about something on occasion. It seems that there is more respect and love with people not of the faith than in the Body of Christ. When will that change? Soon, I hope, for all our sakes. What did God warn us about?

MALACHI 4:5-6 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: 6 And he shall **turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.**

Do we think this applies only to a blinded world? If so, then why is God going to bring terrible destruction upon the world in the day of His vengeance? In that case, then why bother cursing the world if they do not get their act together. Instead, this seems to be a

warning more for the children of God. Jesus told the disciples and, by extension, all of God's children, "because iniquity shall abound, **the love of many brethren shall wax cold.**" (Matt. 24:12). I have often wondered exactly what kind of iniquity is referred to here, but I would guess it is unreconciled offenses. Those who reject friendships in the name of an organization are "having an outward appearance of godliness, but denying the power of *true* godliness. ..." (2 Tim. 3:5).

I can guarantee you one thing: those who understand and keep the Law of God, even with great perfection, but do not have agape love for brethren are not focused on what is vital for salvation. Those who reject friendships when someone leaves an organization are not showing agape love. Have we allowed ourselves to be so controlled or are so loyal to a man or organization that we put aside agape love?

The purpose of keeping the commandments is "**love** out of a pure heart" (1 Tim. 1:5) and, to that end, we are to be "making the increase of the body unto *the* **edifying of itself in love**" (Eph. 4:16). When it comes to knowledge, "**we know in part, and we prophesy in part**" (Matt. 23:23) but it is love that matters:

1 CORINTHIANS 13:2 If I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and **all knowledge**, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am **nothing**.

"All knowledge" in the Greek means knowledge of EVERYTHING; that is, to have the knowledge of God Himself. The word translated *nothing* means "does not exist." So, even if we have the knowledge of God, without sincere, humble, genuine, honest, and earnest agape love there is likely an unhappy end awaiting. If the test of God's agape love working in us is love toward our enemies, what does it say about us who are willing to sacrifice friendships with those who left our group? It seems we have forgotten what agape love is all about:

1 CORINTHIANS 13:7-9 **Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails.** But whether *there be* prophecies, they shall cease; whether *there be* languages, **they shall cease**; whether *there be* knowledge, **it shall vanish away**. 9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part;

Friendships SHOULD never fail among brethren—even when someone leaves an organization, regardless of the reasons, if agape love is truly above all things².

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene

<https://sabbathreflections.org>
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

² 1 Cor. 13:13.