

## SABBATH THOUGHT 2021-12-25—CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

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I thought I would try something. The idea stemmed from my wife Cynthia to write down a few thoughts once in awhile. No agenda. No preaching. Just my thoughts. If you don't want to receive these, please let me know—I will not think less of anyone. If someone wants to be added to the list, send an email (see contact info in the signature).

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While the world keeps Christmas today, my thoughts rarely go there. It took years after I first learned the Truth before my connection to this day faded away but now I don't give it any more thought than when being reminded of Presidents' Day or some other holiday recognized by our government that has little meaning for anyone anymore.

Instead, I have been thinking about the *ekklesia* of God. Paul addressed his epistles to the *ekklesia* groups and always introduced his writings by saying, “to the [*ekklesia*]” or “to the saints”. Noting the place names was more like the address on the envelope. It was where the letter was to be sent, not to define them as individual groups. Even though he included a reference to the place where they lived, he always called them the *ekklesia* or *saints*. The emphasis is on the fact that he was writing to the saints—the “called out ones” of God. Notice:

- “To all those who are in Rome, beloved by God, the called saints” (Rom 1:7).
- “the *ekklesia* of God that is in Corinth”(1 Cor 1:2).
- “to the *ekklesia* of Galatia” (Gal 1:2). (Note that Galatia was a region in Asia, not a city.)
- “to the saints who are in Ephesus” (Eph 1:1).
- “the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi” (Phi 1:1)
- “To all those who are in Rome, beloved by God, the called saints” (Col 1:2).
- “to the *ekklesia* of the Thessalonians” (1 Thes 1:1).

More often than naught, today, we tend to describe each other, not in the sense of the Body of Christ, but rather by the name of a man (i.e., Armstrong), an adjective (United COG, Living COG, etc.), or geography (COG International, COG a Worldwide Association, etc.).

(NOTE: I'm not criticizing any organization. The critical point that I am emphasizing is that God's people are spiritually and emotionally separated along those lines and that is best illustrated by the various organizations. In the end, it is our individual perspective we must each think about.)

This is the problem with the world. Most people distinguish themselves by geography (“I am an American/Italian/Brazilian/African”). When God created mankind, He made people of all colors and cultures (talents and gifts specific to a race) but ALL were in His image and He said it was “exceedingly good.” (Gen 1:31). Rather than embracing variety and uniqueness, mankind is racist. Over time and especially today, people find many other ridiculous reasons to separate from one another: men vs women, rich vs poor, vaxxed vs unvaxxed, liberal vs conservative, democrat vs republican vs independent, etc.

It's almost ironic because mankind was actually unified before the Tower of Babylon—they were not separated by race or culture. The problem was their common goal of doing evil and worshiping other gods. So God dispersed them by language (Gen 11:9) as well as by national/racial identities (Deu 32:8; Acts 17:26). However, in the beginning God did not establish such divisions and the people were intermingled without regard to race or culture.

Today, people of the world identify by the name of their country. While not wrong, people have forgotten that God created them all. When God rescued the ancient Israelites, He called them to be a “kingdom of priests” (Exo 19:6) who would instruct all the other nations of God's laws (Deu 4:6). Were they to be a kingdom of Israelite priests? No, they were to be a kingdom of GOD'S priests. He wanted them to be “priests of GOD”, not the sons of Israel. Since the world wants to forget God (or already has), today they only identify by the name of the wherein they were born.

This way of thinking has prejudiced the Body of Christ as well. Obviously, we should never identify ourselves with a man no matter how great a work he is doing. Tying ourselves to a man instead of God is not looking to the One who gives salvation. Paul warns of this in 1 Corinthians 1:12. However, these days most identify by geography or an adjective. What is the point of referring to a church organization that is or is not “International”? Or “Philadelphia”, which no longer exists on a map. (Actually, it has become another adjective for “brotherly love”.) It seems rather redundant to use the name of a small region on earth if the earth is such a small thing that it is God's footstool (Isa 66:1). In fact, it is a narrow view considering that God's throne is in heaven above (ibid). It is too big for the earth to contain His throne because He is over the entire universe, not just a small single planet.

On the other hand, some organizations use an adjective to imply a characteristic of the group that may or may not be the case. Whether a group is united or living is a judgment of God on a PERSONAL level, which is not something we should proclaim ourselves. If we are united with each other (or whatever the adjective), let it be shown by our **WORKS!**

We are, rarely, what we think we are because we are not perfect. Worse yet, few honestly admit that the Body of Christ is segregated, separated, prejudiced (call it what it is) and

want to change it. The underlying cause is twofold, I think. First, offenses abound among God's people whether it be something personal with other brethren or a minister or a disagreement with the group's doctrinal belief. Second, we are not looking up; that is, to God! If we truly are the children of God; if we truly are of the Body of Christ; if we truly are the called-out-ones (*ekklesia*, wrongly translated *church*); if we truly are begotten of the one Holy Spirit of God; if we truly are the Firstfruits of God; and if we truly have the agape love of God in us, then why do we not resolve the offenses between us? Why do we not serve one another by works of agape love? Why do we not assemble together without imagined boundaries and organizational name tags in buildings that do not contain more words in the title than "Church of God?"

God wants us to love Him, love the brethren, love the world, and love our enemies. Love EVERYONE. Love is shown through good works. God is doing HIS good work in US, which enables us to do good works for the brethren and others. Pray that we do not stifle it. Most of God's people live in a world of luxury compared to days gone by so most do not need food or clothes to survive. Many others are sick and in need of healing. In this we can pray wholeheartedly and often; however, the stark reality is that God tests us through trials even unto death. It is His way of proving our hearts so that He may give us eternity. We should not be discouraged when healing does not happen but rejoice that the one who is suffering has been given strength through God's Holy Spirit to endure to the end for the sake of salvation. Yes, the suffering of some is incredible but their reward will be great.

The greatest need in the *ekklesia* (by the way, it is *ekklesia* singular, not plural—there is only one) today is God's love in us. I hope I am wrong, but it just seems to be sorely lacking. Please, please, please pray that God is merciful to give us the love that we need. The days are coming when no one will refer to themselves by a geographical or adjectorial title. We will either be known as a child of God or not. We will either be known as a saint or not. We will either be known as believers or not. We will either be known as true Christians or not. WHAT we will be known by will determine whether we will either suffer at the hands of the world or not. Those of the *ekklesia* will be severely tested and the only way to endure is with God's love in us. We need to stop looking down and look up to God. Remember the joy that is set before us. Suffering is but for a short time but joy will be eternal. I hope that ALL of God's saints, our brothers and sisters, will be spirit beings in the eternal kingdom of God where we will have ONE, new name—the name of our Most High eternal God and Father!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene

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