

The Old Paths

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“Friendly Fire”

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It has not gone unnoticed by me that since the war started, there are reported incidents of people being killed or wounded by “friendly fire” in Iraq. Though a sad thing to hear, we know this is not uncommon. Countless stories could be told about brave soldiers, who in previous wars, had battled in the front ranks, and met their death at the hands of their own countrymen. When this happens, the military calls this “friendly fire.” In other words, these soldiers were not killed by the enemy, but by their friends/allies. Various reasons might be given for the “friendly fire” casualties. Perhaps the one responsible was tired, perhaps careless, maybe the soldier(s) was given the wrong information, and yes, in some cases it could be intentional! Regardless of the cause of the incident, the result is the same.

In light of the fact that the Bible calls Christians soldiers (II Tim. 2:3-4), let us think about “friendly fire” and apply some spiritual lessons to our lives. Sadly, there are many soldiers of the cross today who are being “downed” by their own team! Brethren, it ought not be this way. We have too few soldiers as it is! How destructive is “friendly fire?” How can it damage the church? Let us study this together.

Friendly Fire Is A Work Of Satan.

One of Satan’s devices is the guise of “friendly fire.” Satan op-

erates under the notion that if he can get one or two to succumb to his will, others will follow. Divide and conquer! This is what Satan did in the Garden of Eden. Remember, Satan was able to tempt Eve, and soon her husband followed (Gen. 3:1-6). In Christ’s day, Satan desired Peter (Lk. 22:31). He also influenced Judas to betray Christ (Jn. 13:2). Later on, we see Peter denying Christ, Judas betraying Christ, and finally all of the disciples left Christ (Lk. 22:54-60; Matt. 26:47-50, Matt. 26:56)! Can we see the destructive nature of “friendly fire?”

Satan’s devices are subtle, for many times, it is that action, word, or influence which seems so “innocent” that leads people to destruction! Satan would love nothing more than to see one or two Christians “kill” the influence of many. Let us be aware of Satan’s devices, and fight them at every opportunity.

Friendly Fire Is A Source Of Discouragement.

How many people do you know that have left the church? More than likely, you know many. Did you talk to them about their absence? If so, what were their excuses? Many times, we have several excuses for not pleasing God, but no reasons. Many know Christians who started pleasing God in the beginning, who were “on fire” for the Lord, and who were zealous in doing God’s will (Titus 2:14). However, after time, they slowed down and were simply “there.” More than likely, we know someone (perhaps even ourselves) who has become discouraged with pleasing God. What are some reasons for this?

1) It could be trials and tribulations that come as a result of being a Christian (Matt. 13:5, 20-21). 2) It could also be that the “Christians” who were supposed to be a godly influence were not doing their job! That has an effect on others, you know!

We rarely, if ever, realize the power in our influence. Whether you know it or not, there are people watching you, and wanting to be like you. Think about that one who has slipped back into sin. Perhaps someone they looked up to let them down. Before we get too one-sided, let’s also remember that the one who slipped back into sin let some people down, too! Now, how will those who are “left behind” respond? Will they leave, too? See how this snowballs!! What a sad thing to happen!

The Bible places much emphasis on our influence, and now we know why (Matt. 5:14-16; I Tim. 4:12; I Pet. 2:21; etc.). Man’s shortcomings in this area are no excuse for one refusing to serve God, please do not misunderstand. However, we need to realize that we play a part (good or bad) in someone’s spiritual well-being on a daily basis.

Friendly Fire Can Bring Out The Worst In Others.

Anyone who has been around for long, has seen what some brethren can do to others. They have heard the gossip, the back-biting, and have seen the scowls on their faces. Have we known brethren to stop looking at one another as a result of some petty conflict that came up? I have! Now, did we ever stop to think of some of the weak brethren (or new in the faith) among us who saw the same things we did? Have we known some to take sides as a result of such conflict? Brethren, when these things happen, it brings out the worst in us, not only from a physical standpoint, but also a spiritual standpoint.

Jesus said, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one

another" (Jn. 13:34). He went on to say, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love...This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:9,12). I wonder if Jesus thought it was important that we love one another? Friendly fire causes man to throw these commandments out the window. What a sad sight for God to look upon His people and see them fighting. Make no mistake, they are not fighting error in such cases, though error can arise in the ranks from time to time; but in the cases we are considering, His people are simply "shooting" at one another in a vain effort to rid themselves of some who are "in their way." John said, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you...If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (I Jn. 4:16, 20). Let us do our best to please God. Let us live our best while upon this earth.

Friendly Fire Hurts The Son Of God.

When you try to invite someone to services, how many times have you heard the question, "Is _____ going to be there?" When you answer, "Yes," then they say, "Well I will not come as long as they are there." Other times, you may hear someone commenting, "I do not know how they can call themselves a church of Christ with _____ going there." I admit freely that sometimes this type of criticism is based on a misunderstanding or simply because they do not want to hear the truth. However, I want us to realize that there are times that the claims of wrongdoing are true. Have we ever thought what this does to Christ and His church?

How many have we run off, not

because we practiced discipline, or preached the truth, but because some did not want to be hit by the "friendly fire?" What do you think that does to Christ? Jesus brought this church into existence. He gave His life, and shed His blood for its purchase (Acts 20:28). Jesus came, not to have the praise of men, but to serve God, and fulfill all the Law (Matt. 5:17). Oh brethren, if we could only take back the black eye we have given Christ! If we could only bring back the untold numbers that have been run off as a result of our killing one another!

Friendly Fire Provides Cover For False Doctrine.

After reading the above, some will decide that in order to stop "friendly fire," we ought to stop exposing false doctrines and false teachers. Some will resolve that such a stand for the truth is simply another form of "friendly fire." Some brethren use this phrase "friendly fire" to rebuke the needed work of rebuking and refuting error (II Tim. 4:2; Eph. 5:11). The truth is, when men advocate theories and doctrines contrary to the doctrine of Christ, we must draw the sword of the Spirit, and fight the good fight of faith (I Tim. 6:12; II Jn. 9-11). As God told His people in the Old Testament, we shouldn't pity those in error (Deut. 7:16; 13:8; 19:13, 21; 25:12).

Jude was not guilty of "friendly fire" when he urged us to contend for the faith; nor are we guilty of such when we obey Jude 3. In fact, those

who criticize their brethren who contend for the faith are actually the ones guilty of "friendly fire." Some of our modern critics would have charged Paul with "biting and devouring" when he warned against the false teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus (II Tim. 2:16-18). Let us not confuse contending for the truth with malicious personal attacks against brethren!

Friendly Fire Can Be Stopped.

Remember, regardless of the reason for the spiritual "friendly fire" incident (carelessness, giving someone the "wrong directions," spiritually weak, or just a flat-out intentional act), we must work to better ourselves and make the necessary changes so that such incidents will not happen again! In spite of all that has happened in the past, if we have the strength to read this article, we have the strength to change. Let us stop the spiritual slaughter of one another. Let us rally around the banner of Christ. Let us stand for truth and oppose all forms of error.

Jesus came to save the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 10:6; 15:24). In those days, there was still time, but it was running short. Let us realize that we are not getting any more time, and work out our "own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). Let us not concern ourselves with things in this life (II Tim. 2:4). Let us look forward, toward Heaven the goal and reward for those who are faithful to God (Phil. 3:13-14). Let us stop this "friendly fire" before it destroys any more souls!

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