

## Friendly Fire

The title to my sermon this morning is an oxymoron. That's not the actual title, but the title is an oxymoron, and I'll tell you what the title is in just a minute. Are you familiar with oxymorons? An oxymoron is when you take two words that appear to be contradictory and put them together to form a saying that seems foolish at first, but are sayings we use all the time and think nothing of it. Let me share a few with you so you get the idea. Freezer burn, good grief, black light, soft rock, plastic glasses, pretty ugly, and the list goes on and on. Probably the most significant oxymoron in the Bible is pregnant virgin, it doesn't make sense, does it? That's not my subject this morning, but it's absolutely true. The incarnation of Christ is an oxymoron that we are going to study throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity and never fully understand.

When we think about oxymorons we kind of chuckle, don't we? But I can assure you that the subject this morning is no laughing matter. The oxymoron title to my sermon this morning is "friendly fire." Friendly fire is a term the military uses when those on your side are the ones shooting at you, and even though it may happen accidentally, the person shot is just as dead as if he were hit by the enemy.

The Pentagon estimates that U.S. "friendly fire" in WW II accounted for 21,000 deaths, and if you counted the number of wounded, that number would be significantly higher. During the Korean War it was 18% who were killed by friendly fire; in Vietnam it was 14%. During the recent Gulf War 35 soldiers were killed by friendly fire, which amounted to 23% of the soldiers who participated there, and 72 soldiers, or nearly 50% of the total number were also wounded by friendly fire, besides losing 7 tanks and 20 Bradley fighting vehicles to friendly fire, and it remains to be seen what the numbers will show once we pull out of Afghanistan, if we ever do! And what about the problems we're having with North Korea right now? South Korea is our ally, but thousands of them will be killed by friendly fire should this thing go nuclear. I'll tell you friends, the times in which we live are very serious and getting more serious by the day and we better make sure we know Jesus and not just know about Him, because very soon now we are going to realize that the prophesied time of trouble is in reality much worse than we have ever anticipated.

All too often when we listen to the news, we hear words like these: "Soldiers were killed today in what appears to be an act of friendly fire." The heart wrenching truth is, these soldiers were killed by their own troops! Deadly fire came from someone they trusted; someone who was supposed to be looking out for their best interest. They thought they were safe while they faced the enemy with their backs to their own, but they were killed nonetheless.

Have you figured out by now where I'm going with this? Do you see the spiritual application brother and sister soldiers in the Lord's Army? The number "shot down" within God's remnant church since its inception by their own brethren can't be counted for multitude, and sadly it's not much different within the home church movement, and probably worse from what I've experienced over the past 25 years. Rather than unifying upon the pillars of our faith and getting

on with proclaiming the three angels' messages to the world like we're supposed to, there are those who would rather argue about every little difference that might exist between various individuals and ministries, and if you don't say what certain people want to hear, you're a heretic, and fanaticism and extremes of various kinds have also taken their toll, and from what I read, it's not going to get any better until real persecution breaks out among us. Would you indulge me for a couple minutes? I'd like to read you something to back up what I say.

This is from *Testimonies for the Church, Volume 6, pages 400, 401*, "As trials thicken around us, both separation and unity will be seen in our ranks. **(By the way, this has been happening already for some years now)** Some who are now ready to take up weapons of warfare will in times of real peril make it manifest that they have not built upon the solid rock; they will yield to temptation. Those who have had great light and precious privileges, but have not improved them, will, under one pretext or another, go out from us. Not having received the love of the truth, they will be taken in the delusions of the enemy; they will give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, and will depart from the faith. **(Now listen carefully)** But, on the other hand, when the storm of persecution really breaks upon us, the true sheep will hear the true Shepherd's voice. Self-denying efforts will be put forth to save the lost, and many who have strayed from the fold will come back to follow the great Shepherd. **(By the way, the fold is not any denomination. The fold is the body of Christ, and that body is made up of all who have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior and are living up to all the truth that has been revealed to them.)** The people of God will draw together **(when? "When the storm of persecution really breaks upon us")** and present to the enemy a united front. In view of the common peril, strife for supremacy will cease **(oh how I long for that day, not for the persecution, but for the unity that we should have had all along. It's just too bad that it takes persecution to make it happen)**; there will be no disputing as to who shall be accounted greatest. No one of the true believers will say: 'I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas.' The testimony of one and all will be: 'I cleave unto Christ; I rejoice in Him as my personal Saviour.'

"Thus will the truth be brought into practical life, and thus will be answered the prayer of Christ, uttered just before His humiliation and death: 'That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.' John 17:21. The love of Christ, the love of our brethren, will testify to the world that we have been with Jesus and learned of Him. Then **(when this oneness exists)** will the message of the third angel swell to a loud cry, and the whole earth will be lightened with the glory of the Lord."

By the way, what is the glory of the Lord? According to *Signs of the Times, June 27, 1895* it's the character of Christ. Therefore the loud cry of the third angel can develop only as people reflect the character of Christ. That's why we just read that, "The testimony of one and all will be: I cleave unto Christ", and if we all cleave unto Him we will become like Him, and thus "The whole earth will be lightened with the glory of the Lord", and I say praise the Lord! I wish it would happen now, because I'm tired of this old world, aren't you? But unfortunately God's people are not yet ready for the third angel's message to swell to a loud cry, evidently. It seems it takes a

good crisis, that's an oxymoron by the way, of some sort to bring people together. We saw it as a country during 9/11, and we just saw it again when hurricanes Harvey and Irma made landfall in Texas and Florida, and when the final Sunday Law crisis comes, we just read that we will see a coming together among God's true and faithful people, finally, because all the little insignificant differences that separate us now, those differences we think are so important, will be put away, and this time there will be a unity that's not going to end until the crisis ends at the coming of the Lord. But until then it looks like we're going to have to continue to march on and deal with the results of friendly fire, unfortunately.

Now that does not mean we can't have unity at this point, because there is a small amount of unity now, there always has been, but it's a unity that is almost insignificant because we are scattered all over the world as individuals and in very small groups. But that's going to change someday soon as the character of Jesus shines forth from one and all who really want to see a finished work and are willing to die to self and live for Christ. It's then that friendly fire will have killed its last victim.

Back in the early '90s Cindy and I were living in Sweet Home, Oregon and we were already meeting with a small group in a home church setting by then, and our small group decided to do a mass literature distribution effort using the National Sunday Law book, and we hit every door in town, which amounted to about 3,000. Well, unbeknownst to us the conference church had scheduled an evangelist effort about that same time, and guess where the interest created by our efforts went? That's right, to the conference church meetings. Well, they had such a good attendance for such a small town because of the Sunday Law books that the church members, and even the pastor there at the time was surprised, and they found out later that it was because of our efforts. Well, to make a long story short, the evangelist, we heard later, actually did a pretty good job of presenting the truth and they had a large baptism. About 40 people came to those meetings as a direct result of our efforts, but after one year there was only one small family left because of friendly fire within the local conference church. They came in the front door and went out the back one by one during the next few weeks and months. How sad. But do you know what's even sadder? It will be nearly impossible to reach those people again at a future time, because they've already been exposed to the truth and then were discouraged from following it because of friendly fire.

You know, sometimes, in a spiritual sense, we can miss the target we're shooting for. Sometimes we overshoot or undershoot. Sometimes we shoot too far to the right or too far to the left. Sometimes we can use the wrong caliber bullets, and so, before we pull the trigger we need to make sure we have the right ammo! The lost need to be hit with the true gospel and not another gospel. The blind need to be hit with the eye salve the Holy Spirit offers. The deceived need to be hit with the truth so they can recover themselves from the snare of the devil. The fanatics need to be hit with balance. The weak need to be hit with the strength of the Lord. The down trodden need to be hit with spiritual uppers. The sad need to be hit with joy, because that's one of the fruits of the Spirit. The lonely and depressed need to be hit with comforting words. And the list goes on!

“Friendly Fire” within the church is all too common today and anything larger than zero casualties is too many, wouldn't you say? Can anyone put an estimate upon the worth of even one soul? Yes, we can, all we have to do is look to the cross of Calvary. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice and paid an infinite price for every single person that has ever been born into this world. The sad part is, so few will accept it, but there are some, and it's our job to find them, and once they're found it's God's plan that they will not become the casualties of friendly fire.

What I'd like to do this morning is look at three categories that will help us keep from, #1 killing our own; #2 killing those who will potentially be our own; and #3 that we might learn how not to become victims of friendly fire ourselves. I'd like to focus this morning on the different types of judging mentioned in God's word. According to the Bible, there are judgments that we are commanded to make and some that we are never to make, and we need to know what they are.

Turn with me in your Bible to **John 7:24** and we'll read about what the Lord Himself said. Jesus said, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.”

To judge someone because of the way they look is easy to do, isn't it? And yet Jesus said this is something we should not do. If judging by outward appearance is wrong, then “righteous judgment” must have something to do with what's on the inside, and what's on the inside usually isn't apparent until we take the time to get to know the person.

I remember reading a story about James White a couple years ago when he was a young preacher in his early 20s, called of God to go around and speak here and there; very poor; didn't have many changes of clothes; in fact, his clothes were worn out and had some holes and patched holes and maybe were a little dirty from his travels, but he showed up for a certain appointment at a church just before the service was to begin, and when the local minister saw him he judged him by his appearance right from the start, but he reluctantly allowed James to come up on the platform, made a very brief introduction and then he went and sat down in the congregation. Now this was during the time when the elders used to stay on the platform with the speaker during the sermon, but he went and sat down in the congregation because he was embarrassed by James' appearance. But nonetheless James began to preach, and he hadn't launched into his sermon very long when the minister out in the congregation realized he had made a terrible mistake, because it became apparent that this travel worn preacher had an intimate relationship with Jesus and that he was a man of God, and guess what that local pastor did? He got up from his seat in the congregation and went up on the platform with James and stayed up there for the remainder of the sermon, and I'm sure he must have made his apologies to James and the congregation afterward. The point is, we are not to judge by appearances, because if we do we will surely come to wrong conclusions.

**Deuteronomy 16:18-20**, “Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with **(what?)** just judgment **(or righteous judgment as we just read a minute ago)**. Thou shalt not wrest

judgment (in other words we are not to twist or distort or pervert the facts, but tell it just like it is); thou shalt not respect persons (we are not to give one person special treatment over another. Jesus said we are all brethren; we are all equal), neither take a gift (or a bribe. For example, if someone is a big downer to my ministry, and they become involved in some kind of sin, am I supposed to just close my eyes to that sin because I'm afraid they'll withhold their support if I rebuke them for their sin? Obviously not. I remember at least twice over the years of being bribed by individuals who wanted me to teach what they believed on a certain subject, or go along with what they wanted me to do, and if I did they would support my ministry, and guess what I told them in the kindest way I knew? "Your money perish with you." We're still in verse 19): for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee."

And so, if we're going to inherit the heavenly Canaan, we've got to render righteous judgment and not be influenced by those who want to further their own agenda.

The next couple verses are from **1 Samuel 16:6, 7**, and as you're finding your place there, let me tell you what was going on. The prophet Samuel had been told by the Lord to find a replacement for king Saul, and he started looking over the sons of Jesse, and this is what it says beginning with **verse 6**, "And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, surely the LORD'S anointed is before him. **(What was Samuel doing? Exactly what Jesus said not to do, judging by appearances. And so, even prophets can make mistakes. Samuel must have thought, "Oh this guy is so handsome, so tall, so talented, has such a kingly bearing that surely this is the one the Lord has chosen." Have you ever been impressed that a certain person would make a better Christian than someone else? I have to tell you a short story. When I lived in Arizona I was in the carpet cleaning business and I met someone who was in the carpet laying business. He referred work to me and I referred work to him, and right from the start I said to myself, "This guy would make a wonderful Christian. And I worked with Mike and I studied with Mike and I talked to Mike about spiritual things on many occasions, but in the end he refused to become a Christian, and at the same time there was another fellow working for Mike, but I said to myself, "Nothing is ever going to become of this one, he's of no account here and he's got some bad habits and so forth, but guess what? He's the one who became a Christian through someone else's efforts and I missed a great opportunity, because appearances are not always what they appear to be. Verse 7) But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have (what?) refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."**

Not long after I became a Christian I attended the East Oakland, California Seventh-day Adventist church, and first my wife and I, who was killed in a car accident in 1987, came that first Sabbath morning dressed very plainly. I wore my best T-shirt and Levis and she wore a pair of slacks and a blouse, and we were both wearing wedding rings, and of course these things wouldn't matter these days, but it did 45 years ago, that alone says a lot about what direction

the church is headed. But anyway, my wife was still smoking, and no doubt the people could smell it on her, and I was still drinking alcohol at the time, but guess what? Not one of the people in that church tried to correct us because of the way we appeared. And I am really thankful for that, because I am from the southwest suburbs of Chicago, and nobody tells me what I should and shouldn't do, that was my attitude. If anyone of the old saints would have said, "Don't you have something better to wear to church than Levis? Don't you know what the Bible says about wearing gold? You know, your wife is still smoking! Doesn't she realize her body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?" If anyone would have said anything like what I just said, we would have been out of there faster than a bullet, and I'm sure I would not be in the ministry today. I don't know where I'd be today, probably dead because of the way I was living.

By the way, what we just read a minute ago about man looking on the outward appearance is good counsel for young people who are looking for someone to spend the rest of their lives with. Somewhere in the Spirit of Prophecy it says looks should have absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with our choice of a life companion. That's not a direct quote, but it says something like that, and that makes sense, doesn't it? And yet with many, that's about the only consideration, and we wonder why the divorce rate is so high, even among Christians. It is a Christlike character that one looking for a life companion should be looking for. Have you ever noticed how many beautiful people can become very ugly once you get to know them, especially when they don't get what they want, and how plain looking people who have a godly character become more and more beautiful the more you get to know them?

I remember years ago there was a certain young lady who was attending our home church, and she was about to be married, and all she could talk about was how handsome this guy was that she was going to marry. On and on and on she went, talk about lovesick sentimentalism, she had it! And I can remember saying to this young lady what the Spirit of Prophecy says about allowing appearances to be our guide when selecting a husband or a wife, and she heard me, but she wasn't listening, and she continued to go on and on about how good looking this man was. And guess what? She got married and it wasn't very long before I was talking to her again at church one day about how unhappy she was with her marriage, and I said, "Do you remember what I told you about not allowing appearances to be our guide in selecting a spouse? And she didn't remember, in fact she said, "Now you tell me." And I said, "I did tell you, but you weren't listening." It's a rare thing to find physical beauty and character beauty in the same person, so young people beware. If we accustom ourselves to look upon the heart as God does, and not just the outward appearance, then we'll be more likely to choose as God would choose, don't you think?

Go to **1 Corinthians chapter 5** please; I'd like to look at this whole chapter rather quickly, because I want you to get the context, because there's a really important point in this chapter dealing with judging. Notice what it say beginning with **verse 1**, "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. **(I believe this was a step mother, but still, it's sin.)** And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might

be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit **(or with the judgment I've already expressed)**, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh **(Now what do you suppose that's talking about? What should happen if there's someone in the church who's involved with this kind of sin, or any open sin for that matter? If they are not willing to listen and make a course correction they should be disfellowshipped, right? That's the way we give them to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, or the carnal mind)** that the spirit **(or the intelligent part of our being that makes our decisions and forms our character)** may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. **(You see, when a person leaves Christ and becomes connected to Satan, the church must acknowledge that by disfellowshipping that person if they refuse to change, otherwise the whole church becomes guilty of that person's sin, it's called corporate accountability. And secondly it's for the purpose of giving that person a wake-up call that they might return to the Lord through repentance and be saved in the end. And so, disfellowshipping is twofold in its purpose, it's for the protection of the church body and it's the best thing that can happen to the open sinner who refuses to repent. The purpose of disfellowshipping should be for the purpose of reconciliation so that the one disfellowshipped might see their folly and return to the Lord. Verse 6)** Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven **(or a little sin)** leaveneth the whole lump? **(Sin affects the whole body of Christ and the whole person committing the sin)** Purge out therefore the old leaven **(get rid of the sin and sinner if need be)**, that ye may be a new lump **(or that you may be justified once again)**, as ye are unleavened. **(At least the church is supposed to be without sin)** For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us **(In other words, if we are in Christ the destroying angel will pass over us as it did Israel of old if we follow God's instructions):** therefore let us keep the feast **(the feast that has now become the Lord's Supper)**, not with old leaven **(or the old yeast of sin)**, neither with the leaven **(or sin)** of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world **(Paul draws a distinction here between believers and unbelievers. We can't help associating with sinners in this world; to avoid that we'd have to leave this world, but when it comes to sin in the church, that's an entirely different matter)**. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat **(we're still in the context of the Lord's Supper here. Someone who is in open sin is not to be welcomed to participate in the most sacred ordinance of the church)**. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? **(or those not part of the church)** do not ye judge them that are within? **(You see, we are only to judge those who are part of the body of Christ)** But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." And so, by following this instruction we would be rendering righteous judgment.

**James 2:13,** "For He **(God)** shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy **(this is a principle that's found all through the Bible. If we fail to show mercy, we will not receive**

mercy); and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.” In other words, showing mercy triumphs over being judged without mercy every time. And so, judging righteously must also include mercy, because that's the way God judges us.

**Luke 6:36-38**, “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not (**this would be unrighteous judgment**), and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned (**doesn't John 3:17 say that God didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved? And shouldn't we follow Christ's example?**): forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.” Oh how careful we should be in our dealings with saints and sinners alike, because there's a direct correlation to the way we will be judged.

**Proverbs 17:9**, “He that covereth a transgression (**by not blabbing it to others**) seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.” And isn't that true? If we repeat the sins of others to others, we make enemies very quickly. Aren't we given clear council in **Matthew 18** about how to deal with sin in a brother or sister? The first step is to do what? “Go and tell him his fault between you and him alone”, and if we do that, most of the time steps two and three will not be necessary.

In **Titus 3:2, 3** Titus says we are to, “Speak evil of no man (**Christian and non-Christian alike**), . . . but be gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. (**Why?**) For we ourselves (**it says**) also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.”

That was the condition of all of us at one time, wasn't it? So what business do we have to jump on someone else for doing the same things we've done in the past? They may not know any better, just like we didn't know any better until we met Jesus. We need to be very careful in this area. Remember what Jesus said to Mary Magdalene? “Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more.” People need to understand that they can be forgiven, no matter what they've done, and that there is power available to go and sin no more. There's no saving value in condemnation alone. It's our job to inform people that there is hope, and yes to warn them also of the consequences if they continue in disobedience, but only after they've had an opportunity to know the truth.

**Galatians 5:14-16**, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. (**Good advice, isn't it? But how do we follow it? It tells us in the next verse**) This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” If our behavior is in harmony with the Spirit, which will produce in us the fruit of the Spirit, then we will not bite and devour one another, and there will be sweet peace and harmony as a result. It can't be any other way as long as we abide in Christ.



**Galatians 6:1, 2**, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. **(Sounds to me like we have a duty toward those who have fallen away from the truth; not to condemn, but to draw them back to Christ. But if we are not spiritual, if we are not living in harmony with the word of God and not bearing the fruit of the Spirit, then we better stay home, because we will not say and do the right thing that will cause repentance and restoration. If we go with the attitude that we are willing to die that that person might have eternal life, then our efforts have a good chance of restoring such an one, but if not, then we will probably do only harm.)** Bear ye one another's burdens **(it says)**, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

**2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15**. The context here is dealing with church members who are busybodies that won't work and who expect the church to feed and take care of them. Paul says, “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. **(Ashamed of himself for taking advantage of the church, and hopefully he will change)** Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish **(or warn)** him as **(what?)** a brother.” So if we ever find ourselves having to deal with this kind of situation, we're not to have a better than thou attitude like the Pharisees, but to do what we can to bring them back to be a faithful follower of Christ.

**James 5:19, 20**, “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him **(or does something to bring him back to Christ)**; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death **(that's the second death)**, and shall hide **(or cover)** a multitude of sins.” That's what being part of the body of Christ is all about, doing what we can to bring sinners back to Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, and not just kicking them out and saying good riddance.

In **Micah 7:19** it says if one returns to God, He will have compassion on him and will subdue his iniquities and cast all his sins into the depths of the sea. And when that happens brothers and sisters, we have no right to go deep sea fishing, if you know what I mean. If God has taken away a person's sins, we have no right to throw those sins back in their face. They've been buried and they should remain buried, and this goes for the husband and wife relationship as well. Don't go digging up old transgressions that have been repented of and forgiven. Being a tool in God's hands to hide a multitude of sins is much better than being a tool of the devil to create unnecessary discord.

**Acts 9:1-4**, “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way **(that would be those walking the way Jesus walked)**, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”

You see dear friends, the way we treat one another is the way we are treating Jesus. Solemn thought, isn't it? Remember when Jesus spoke about taking in strangers, those in need, the sick, and those in prison? He said, "Verily I say unto you, in as much as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you've done it unto me." Are Christians and non-Christians alike safe within our midst? Or will they become casualties of friendly fire?

In fact, when you think about it, wasn't Jesus killed by friendly fire? Yes He was! Notice what **Zechariah 13:6** says about those who will ask Jesus a certain question when they get to heaven. "And one shall say unto him, what are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends." Jesus was more than wounded, wasn't He? He was killed by friendly fire.

**John 1:11** says "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." Usually when we read this we think of the Jews, don't we? But it has a much broader application than that. He came to His own world, and His own world rejected Him. Doesn't the word of God testify to the fact that every time we sin it's like crucifying Jesus afresh? And we've all sinned, have we not? Therefore Jesus was killed by an act of friendly fire by our own hand, whether we meant to do it or not. But listen to this good news, Jesus said, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." Because we have all sinned, we are just as guilty of crucifying Jesus as those who pounded the nails in His hands, but "Where sin abounded, grace did **(what?)** much more abound." We should be thankful for that, and we need to make sure that the weapons of our warfare are trained upon the real enemy before we dare to pull the trigger.

Well, we haven't talked much yet about how to avoid becoming a casualty of Friendly Fire ourselves, but I believe the answer can be found in **Proverbs 29:18** where it says, "Where there is no vision the people perish." This verse is speaking about more than rejecting the visions that have come through the Spirit of Prophecy, but also has reference to having big ideas and dreams to see a finished work. Too many of us have lost sight of why we're here. In order to minimize the incidents of friendly fire, we need take our eyes off of ourselves and put them on Jesus and the vision He has for His church. It's obvious that those who are busy shooting their own troops have a blurred vision of what God wants them to do, and they need the eye salve of the Holy Spirit; in fact, that's what we all need. Too many of us have lost the vision about why God raised up the Advent movement to begin with. There are multitudes today who are perishing for a want of the truth, and too many of us have been shooting our own. We argue about things of no real importance and allow those things to separate us while we neglect the very reason of our calling. I could easily spend an hour talking about all the differences of opinion we have on various subjects and the way we interpret them, but most of us have already done too much of that in the past, including yours truly, so I'm not going to go there this morning.

Where should our focus be? The answer, I believe, is found in ***Testimonies for the Church, Volume 9, page 19*** where it says, "In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the word of God. They have been given

a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.”

What a difference it would make if we all followed these instructions instead of majoring on our own pet ideas. How is it with you, friend? What has your mind been absorbed with? What has been occupying your time? What have you been doing with your talents and the means God has place in your hands? If we truly catch a vision of what can be accomplished by us proclaiming the three angels' messages to perishing souls instead of a hundred other things the devil would like us to, it will stop friendly fire in its tracks and we will hasten the day of the Lord instead of continuing to delaying that great event. We've been here in this sin cursed earth way too long and we should have been in heaven ere this, but here we are and we still have a work to do, a work that has been neglected for far too long, because too many of us have been pushing our own agenda, whatever that may be, instead of obeying the call to preach this gospel of the kingdom so the end can come. May God help us to do it, and do it the way that will put an end to the casualties of friendly fire.

Jesus said, “The harvest truly is great **(and it is, isn't it?)**, but **(what?)** the laborers are few **(there are plenty of laborers out there, but there are only a few who have a present truth message for this time and a selfless burden to see souls saved in God's kingdom)**: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest.” The emphasis is on He! If the Lord sends a laborer, you can be sure they will be laboring with the right purpose and for the right reason and with the right message, and dead bodies as the result of friendly fire will not follow them wherever they go. We can all be laborers, and we should be, but let's make sure Jesus is the One who sends us so we don't go out into the field and do damage to the harvest or leave them laying in the field with mortal wounds because of friendly fire. May God help us say and do the right things for Jesus sake.