THOUGHTS OF APRIL, 2017

1. In John chapter 6, Jesus blessed that which was of simple obedience, little faith, and genuine humility. That describes the disciples, and it describes Jesus Himself. He did only that which His Father wanted, had the “little” faith that would move mountains, and He was the All-mighty Creator who really had become a human. The combination of those ingredients opens the doors of our Father’s storehouse to us. We don’t have to try to please Him, but to simply obey Him, exercise the little faith that we have, and offer ourselves up to Him. There is no room in the Family for begging our Father to bless our labors. It is His kingdom, we are His children, His is the work and the results.
2. This Thought is not an absolute, but I have noticed that Jesus invites us, or asks us, to do certain things. Requests and invitations are not commands, at least not firm commands. When He requests or invites, He is indicating that He is allowing us to decline – possibly with loss but not with sin. It is best to accept His invitations, don’t you think? But we have options if He expressed “only” His desire.

On one occasion, He said, “Some things won’t happen unless you are there.” That was not a command, and not entirely an offer; just a statement that landed in my soul as, “Son, let’s do something together that I wouldn’t do with anyone else.” It took me about two seconds to respond.

But, we don’t have options when He clearly commands us to do something. We even call them “commandments,” like the Ten Commandments or the Greatest Two Commandments of Jesus [to love the Lord with all we are and have, and our neighbor as ourselves]. Those are clearly commandments. There is no wiggle room; we either obey Him or we sin, suffering the loss caused by flagrant sin.

In regards to your discipleship in Jesus, you have probably noticed that you were offered, or invited into, discipleship under Him [often through a proxy]. He made His invitations to His original disciples very clear, and clearly they were options, which they still are for us. Turning Him down was not and is not disobedience or sin. We simply do not accept His invitation to be disciplined by Him or by His chosen proxy. We will be at loss for not accepting His offer, but it was “just an offer.” It’s a matter of the heart.

So, we see Jesus first inviting them into discipleship, then later commanding them as His accomplished disciples. First, they were disciple prospects or student disciples to whom He would say, “If” [such as “If you want to be my disciples”]. Later, to completed [but never perfect] disciples He said, “Go,” “do,” “don’t,” or “stay.” Those were instructions of command strength.

I have not checked the complete conformity of this Thought with Scripture, but it seems to be on target. The trajectory of Life starts with being an unbeliever [all start here], to a believer [entirely by God’s choice and grace], disciple [that’s an option left to us], mentor [also an offering], and overcomer [credited with “Victory!”].

1. When we look at Jesus’, words: “If you don’t do this you cannot be my disciple,” and realize that those very things are not being done or even taught in the church, what are we to make of it? Perhaps, simply, that the church has believers but few disciples? But He commanded us to make disciples, teaching them to do everything that He taught His disciples. That was not a request and not an option. It was and is a command.

Making disciples is much harder, costly, and time consuming than leading unbelievers into eternal life. Making babies is joyful and quick; making disciples takes deeper intimacy, self-exposure and years of the mentor dying [laying down his/her life] for the disciple. Jesus spent three years and had a 91.7 % [11/12] success rate, plus some others who came and went, who were part-time, somewhat accomplished disciples.

Everywhere Paul went he concentrated on making disciples. Everywhere the church is, disciple-making is the Lord’s top priority. Disciples and the process of disciple-making attract those whom the Lord has prepared for reality, while deterring others who in God’s eyes are not ready – Acts 5:13. Perhaps the others will be ready tomorrow, but until then they are nurtured by seeing the real thing in others. The unprepared flesh does not want to be disciplined because we love ourselves too much. It takes a preparation of the Lord in the heart of the unbeliever for us to want to lay down our lives, to hate self [meaning a godly rejection, sick of sin and of measured service to the Lord] and anything or anyone who would hinder our discipleship.

1. In this Thought I’ll go where I have had very little experience, but I have had that little experience. Choir directors have a problem when a soloist joins the choir. A choir is a mixture of singers who will blend their voices into one and will follow the director. They have to listen to others’ voices, and blend and coordinate their voices with others in the choir as the group is being directed by the director. In contrast, a soloist sings alone, is self-centered [that’s o. k. for a soloist but not for a choir member], and listens to himself/herself while singing. A soloist may or may not follow a director.

John heard Jesus say to His Father, and so he wrote, “I in them and you in Me, that they may be perfected in unity ..” Among other things, Jesus the human being said His Father’s Spirit was in Him [Jesus] and that that Spirit would [soon] be in them, and that from that powerful provision believers would or could be perfected as a group. Jesus was perfected as a “soloist,” and He was offering Spirit-provided believers that same perfection as a “choir.” He came to form a choir [body]. For that to happen we must be qualified [possess His Spirit], committed [to the Director], and coordinated [being one among many who are blended]. Then our individual contribution will point to the choir and its Director, not to “me.”

You can see that the greatest soloist could be disqualified, especially if assigned to sing in a small choir of beginners. Paul wrote that the weapons of our warfare are divinely powerful, designed and able to destroy fortresses – 2 Cor. 10:4. Those fortresses are within people, even/especially within believers, and are serially destroyed by the Spirit as we take up our crosses daily and follow Jesus. The Spirit will develop unity between us as we yield to Him who is in us. He is attracted to Himself in others for that very purpose.

1. Jesus took His beatings alone. He took His beratings alone. He went to His death alone. And, He invites us to follow Him through those things in our lives into our resurrection. We have brothers and sisters around the world who have accepted His invitation and are going through those things, many alone. My Thought is, are we prepared to go the same route in order to get to where the Lord and our cloud of witnesses now reside? Our flesh wants another way with the same results, and some of us do seem to have been assigned a much easier route, but are we prepared to say “Yes” to the tougher, alone route? Acts 14:22; Heb. 12:1.
2. Faith is not a way to believe; it is a way to trust. That which we believe must be lived in order to be faith. That which is often called faith is not faith if it is not lived [worked outwardly into action]. Faith must have works in order to be seen that faith works.

One way we know we have faith is because we love the brethren – meaning other believers, of all types and conditions. So, how do we know we love those brethren, that we are not fooling ourselves? We will stand in judgment before Jesus, so it is important to know if we are living the truth. The answer: Look to see if we are laying down our lives for one another. That is a simple activity in our daily lives that can tell us if our faith is only a theological point of intellectual agreement or is a life of trusting the Lord and His word. So, I’m Bob and you are \_[you]\_. We have the world’s goods – food, clothing, shelter, etc. When we saw a brother in need today we meet his need. Right? Wow! What a relief to know that we live real faith. We are not loving with word or tongue, but in deed and truth. Bring on the judgement day!

Therefore, being assured that our faith is faith as the Lord defines faith, we can turn to John 15:7 where we read that when the Lord answers our prayers He is confirming the faithfulness of our abiding. Time for rejoicing.

1. Benjamin Franklin was a remarkedly remarkable man. He excelled in leadership, politics, Christian-guided common sense, diplomacy, science, manners, journalism, business, and the art of observation. He was his father’s tenth and last son, thus his given name. And, he was the youngest son of the youngest son for five generations [make of that what you may, because it probably does speak of the innate humility of the youngest]. If you enjoy reading, consider a condensed biography of him or, if you like to read more thoroughly, his Autobiography is excellent and exciting.
2. The Center for World University Rankings, located in the United Arab Emirates, published its 2017 report this month. The report ranked a list of 25,000 degree granting institutions around the world. Israel’s Technion [Israel’s Institute of Technology] ranked first in the world in the field of aerospace engineering, fourth in Computer Science-Theory and Methods, and eighth in the world for Computer Science-Information Systems category. Several other Israeli universities were ranked highly, in the top ten of their categories.

1. Why did the Son of God [Jesus Christ] leave home [heaven] to come to our slum [earth] for the purpose of dying? Answers: 1) His Father sent Him [John 3:16], 2) Jesus loved us [John 15:13], 3) For His and our future together [Heb. 12:2-3], and 4) It was Their eternal plan for Their creation [us and all else of creation] to be reconciled to Him. At this time the shoe is on our foot, fellow ambassadors. He has commissioned us to make disciples. Did you get the memo – Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:4-8, 2:22-36; Rev. 1:4-8; 22:17-21?
2. Why are men usually paid more than women for doing the same work? The answer is rooted in human history, and those roots have a way of continuing to produce that which they originally produced. So, initially, men were the away-workers and the women were the home makers. The men made the family’s living, meaning brought in the meat, produce and money [if there was money], and the women made life worth living [back at the cave, shack, house, homestead, castle, city]. When jobs were more formalized and money was paid as wage, men worked for the wage and supported family life, that which only the women could produce, nourish, and maintain. Men and women had definite positions and there was very minimal crossover.

Those two positions eventually began to flip as what we call “civilization” developed. Married men were paid more than single men because “they had a family to support.” That was a clear and logical factor for determination of wages. When single-men workers married and started a family, they got raises for that very reason alone. When women began to work outside the home they were paid less, like single men were paid less, or perhaps not as much as single men and, again, for good reason at the time.

For those earlier job markets, women were worth less than men -- they were not as strong, had less endurance in hours per day and less years of commitment to the job, were usually less educated and less trained for out-of-the-home jobs, and were less adaptable because of many cultural factors. Women had more absences, some of which were associated with their femininity and motherhood. Because of cultural experience and acceptance, and innate creation, men were better leaders of both men and women.

Civilization and modernization, and necessity during wartimes, began to narrow the pay gap, especially in the later 1900s. Social activism pushed for quicker changes in traditional pay, promotions and ability but, like forced revolutions of any form, those results have often been more imprecatious than blessings. Social evolutions from the marketplaces of education, finances, family, religion, manufacturing, and politics bring about peaceful changes instead of strife, as was shown by the abolition of slavery in England compared to its abolition in the United States. Pulling up aspects of a culture by its roots creates pain, conflict, and other problems that last longer than the original problem would have lasted, had it been allowed its natural devolution.

1. How do you know when you lack something, unless you are faced with a test in which you need more than you have? The Pharisees lacked, so when Jesus put them to the test their lack showed. They didn’t see their need, but there it was, waving in the breeze. He did not have the personal satisfaction of seeing them either change or be chastised during His human lifetime.

John the Baptist saw unrepentance among some who came to be baptized by him. When they asked why John refused to baptize them, John told them what they lacked. We are not told whether they then repented. Nicodemus came to Jesus in a genuine display of humility, remarkable for a Pharisee, and Jesus worked with him to supply that which he needed – spiritual insight. We are not told that Nicodemus “saw” and “heard.” Those are two examples of spiritual blindness and deafness being tested, and failing the test.

Sometimes we know we lack. We have a hunger, a sense of a gap in our knowledge or character or ability. Then we are exposed to that which we lack and we jump at the opportunity for growth and the fullness it offers. This is the ideal, is it not? But there remains the possibility that we lack, and that we must seek in order to have. How do you know when you lack? Is it enough to use our ordinarily reliable default by saying, “Just trust the Lord. He will lead us.”? Sometimes we must see more of the truth before we can find.

1. “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” – Rom. 8:32. It would not have made sense to God, nor to us, that God would completely give us Himself in His Son, **without giving us everything that He has given His Son**. That verse deserves some space in our day.

God is [so has endless supplies of] patience, love, wisdom, and all else that is perfect and powerful and eternal. He submitted everything of Himself to His love for His creation [mainly for the humanity part of His creation]. Humanly speaking, He laid aside His privacy and took up His love so He could do for us that which He had created us incapable of doing for ourselves. His desire was to enlarge Himself by taking into Himself [into his perfect and powerful and eternal Self] millions of us, to be made part of Him, forever. His love overcame His desire for privacy, just as our love overcomes our desire for privacy.

That would complete His purpose for us, but would forever cost Him because, to do that, He had to change. We reply: “God had to change?! But that’s impossible! He should not do that! He cannot do that! That’s unwise, at the least.” The only way for Him to take His creatids into Himself would be for us to first become perfect as He is perfect. All of us had failed to be perfect both in attitudes and actions [although Enoch and Elijah had done very well], so He paid the price for our being made perfect through the gift of His Son. His love for us, His utterly failed creatids, was greater than His desire for having His Son with Him in future eternity as He had been with Him in past eternity.

And His Son will never be the same because He has taken permanently our human form [albeit now in glorified state, as we too will be] and because now we are in the Son; and our Father will never be the same because we are now in Jesus and Jesus is in His Father. Everyone has changed, even though God’s perfection in love has not changed. That which the perfect rules of God, adapted to humanity, could not do, has been done through the sacrifices of Himself -- our Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. In the process the Holy Servant also is often being grieved, but soon all will be well. We are all soon to be Home; all of the family, those already in heaven and those still on earth.

Back to Romans 8:32. God’s project for humanity is to bring many into Himself, making them perfectly like His Son. I’m glad that is His project. It is mine, also, but by myself I would be a total failure, not just an occasional failure. He will complete it, having the means and the time to get it done.

1. Last month, Thought number 24 said: “This Thought is worth all the others this month. Prayer is the distinct act of returning to the Lord, in silence or spoken, that which He has given to us. Prayer is therefore a tool which we return to Him when our task is completed, and get again when called upon to join Him in another creative project. All else is simply ‘saying a prayer,’ a common aspect of religion.”

Let’s enlarge upon that Thought, the thought that prayer is a tool of God that we are to use or not use according to our situation. All through Scripture the Lord invites us to enter into conversation with Him. He gives us information. He has us join with Him in creating, moving and stopping things and people. He is the one who has opened the door in heaven, who hears everything we say, who listens as we talk from our hearts, and who responds by voice and action, even to changing the movement of the sun, raising the dead back to life during this earth-life, and healing scratched little fingers. He made us to be like He is, and made us to be members of His eternal family, so conversation with Him, and heavenly responses between us and Him, are logical spiritually. He is involved in everything that touches us, and He has a design for all of it, including the number of hairs we have on our head, today!

We move His [the Workman’s] hand by talking with Him. “Shall I do anything without telling My prophets?” “Concerning the work of My hands, command ye Me.” “If My words abide in you, and you abide in Me, ask what you will ..” [Those are close paraphrases – ed.] Conversation with Him is a tool which empowers us as His sons and for functioning as His sons, just as conversation between headquarters and units on a battlefield is a tool – for unity, coordination, and victory.

Part of receiving from Him involves asking; if we don’t ask, we may not receive. Payer is our telephone to the Central Communicator, who coordinates every detail of creation every moment, and modifies it as pleases Him. We please Him.

He has given us prayer to use in innumerable matters, and to stop using when a job is done – even if in the natural it does not appear to be finished. He tells us to stop praying by speaking to us or by a sense of assurance when the matter is settled [“accomplished,” “It is finished.”]. Because then we have completed the conversation with Him [we don’t pray for that which we already have], we give the matter to Him and get about our lives with confidence, as Moses did at the Red Sea, and Paul did about his thorn in his flesh after praying three times that it be removed.

When the Lord tells us that the matter is settled, whether we like His choice of outcome or not [some sins are unforgivable (Matt. 12:31-32) and some sins lead to death (1 John 5:16) and sometimes we ask amiss so we must help one another process through our lives in faith, bearing our consequences.] But the point is that we stop talking with Him about it, except to praise and thank Him for being our loving and righteous judge. At that point, we who had been co-workers are taken off that job and likely given other assignments. We may check back in with Him from time to time until the matter is completed in the natural, to see if anything has developed in which we should again be involved.

The point is that a time comes when we are to stop praying in a matter, turn the situation back to “only” the Lord, and perhaps to others whom He may choose. Our work on that project has been completed.

1. We humans are all alike, until we become followers of Jesus. Then, unbelievers and believers are very different. Example: Polls show that many unbelievers do not believe in God because, they say, of all the suffering in the world; that at least if a god exists He is obviously incapable and unloving and therefore unnecessary. But something wonderful happens when we come to faith in Jesus. Almost all believers testify that when they suffer they grow spiritually; that the suffering was painful indeed, but worth the results. That’s a miraculous, basic change. What a wonderful God!
2. At 87 years of age [as of 5-1-17] I am in good health and am active and productive. For years, I have known that I will be alive here on Earth only until the Lord’s perfect time to get me out of this limited and declining body and onward into the greater and more obvious state of reality, where millions of His saints already await the ages to come. But in spite of my expectancy of extended life in this current body, it is common for me to say, “Help yourself” when someone thanks me for counseling, a teaching, my THOUGHTS, or any sort of positive thing from me toward them.

When I say “Help yourself” to you, I am extending an open invitation for you to come take more of what I am and have, if you want it. Of course, others have what I have, and have more or less of “what I have,” but if you want more of what I am and have after these 87 years [53 walking with the Lord], “Help yourself.” You may not have more than 20 years to step up and receive. Tomorrow on earth is not assured.

1. In the Lord’s Prayer, perhaps better called “the Disciples’ Prayer” because Jesus gave it to His disciples for their study and use, He and they and we pray “.. thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Have you thought about how much of God’s will is done in heaven compared to His will being done on earth? We usually think the basic thought, “God’s will is always done in heaven but certainly is not always done on earth.” But is that true?

If we are using our over-arching “God’s eternal view” of from before time until after time, the answer is that God’s will is always being done everywhere. But that is a stretch for many believers, especially for those who perceive God’s working only on the level of the battle of good and evil on earth. But we are given a record of events in heaven that provides us reason for pause, so we can question, starting with: “Is God’s will always done in heaven?”

First, Satan and one-third of God’s angels rebelled in heaven and were cast down onto the earth [Is. 14:12-15]. They lost their residence in heaven, although the devil still has times of visitation, when invited. That rebellion surely sounds “bad,” and it was “bad,” but it was part of God’s over-arching plan for redemption of His creation. On that level, it was “good,” God had created it [Is. 45:7], and anyone who was involved in the badness of it could be redeemed if they repented – which Satan will not do [Rev. 20:7-10].

Secondly, in “the Gospel of” Job, we see Satan, who had been beckoned by God to give an accounting of his latest efforts on earth, standing before God. Satan was and is still fully deceived, and was there being set-up by God for Job’s and God’s glory – and for us to get the good news that God is always engineering all things from His eternal, over-arching perspective.

Third, we see that same principle in Exodus 5 through 14 when the Lord repeatedly hardened Pharaoh’s heart [a “bad” thing] in order to do wonderful things so that the world would give glory to God. And, those who would believe and obey Him could expect the same. That required Moses and the Israelites to live in the over-arching view as they walked through the battle of good and evil. Their minds and faith were in heaven, and their feet were on the earth.

So, heavenly prospectors know that the Lord God is the architect, engineer, foreman, and mechanic of all things, although He certainly does use some dirty tools. All things work together for God’s good, and those who love God and yield to His purposes will see it in their lives. Such is not true to those who do not love Him and do not yield to His purposes, whether they are believers or unbelievers.

1. This is Resurrection Sunday – Easter. Let’s orientate ourselves a bit to what is going on and where we are in it. As said above, our feet are on earth but our minds are in heaven. That’s not entirely correct, because our minds are also on earth, but with a heavenly orientation. This will be heavily heavenly.

Where are you now? [In Christ, seated at the right hand of God.] What does that mean? [“I’ve got a home in glory land that out-shines the sun.”] How did it happen? [The Lord picked me, plunged me into Jesus, and I am permanently His son.] Who said so (that being so preposterous)! [The Lord.] You have your own ways of answering those questions.

Here are some associated statements adapted from the New Testament: I was nailed to the cross with Jesus. I died on the cross with Jesus. I was buried with Jesus. I was resurrected from the dead with Jesus. I was made alive with Jesus. I ascended into heaven with Jesus. I am seated at the right hand of my Father with Jesus. I will return to earth with Jesus. I will reign in Jerusalem with Jesus over the earth. In view of that, Jesus is my life. He is my Truth. Aside from Him I am and have nothing.

That’s what is going on, and we are in it. For the remainder of our earth-lives we walk about on the earth with our heads both on earth and in heaven. Jesus showed us how to do it and gave us what we need to do likewise, so we can.

1. The spirit of the antichrist comes to the church offering a focus on the church, not on Christ. The church system, worship ministries, religious buildings, and sacraments take the place of Jesus Christ Himself. Some questions: Why is Jesus not enough? Why do we need the embellishments that are good in themselves but soon enough find a way to place themselves between us and Jesus? Why is our walk with the Lord and His people, and following the Great Commission, not enough for complete fulfillment of our Christian walk?

The Christ-centered person has a relationship with Jesus and other Christians, and it is satisfying to him/her and to the Lord. One function of the church is to prepare Christians to be able to live and give victorious Life even without the necessity of having contact with other Christians. In the flesh, we don’t desire to walk alone, or to stand alone in trying situations, but that is the Holy Spirit’s project for us. Walking alone can be on a desert island, in a dungeon, in a difficult relationship, or among a multitude of humans. If you are not ready to go it alone, but find yourself alone, the situation will be used by the Lord to perfect you in that situation – usually not to get you out of it.

If we resist that process, and hold onto our loneliness, we are a set-up for relationships that offer harm more than righteousness. Lonely people are easy prey for wolves. Our personal relationship with Him dispels loneliness.

1. Our brother N. K. speaks of the reality of the body of Christ. I will lightly edit it and will not use quotation marks. The human body is made of an accumulation of well-knit body cells which are intrinsically interconnected, interdependent, and inseparable. Like St. Paul, I find a lot of sense and meaning in this imagery as an image which describes the Church whose Head is CHRIST.

In many senses, each body cell can be thought of as an entity of its own but independent of the rest of the body it cannot be an entity; it can only be an entity within the context of the rest of the body. Likewise, we the individuals make up the church, and here I am not talking about denominations but THE CHURCH OF CHRIST. Unfortunately, many of us lose sight of this fact.

As far as I am concerned any believer from any denomination, so long as they are genuine and honest believers in Christ, makes up the Body of Christ -- The Church. Consequently, the health, growth and functioning of the Church depends on this realization.  I agree with you when you say that this Church idea is not human but DIVINE. Therefore, there should not be any ownership of the Church other than her Author -- God. [End of N. K.’s comments.]

I know our brother, N. K. He has laid down his life for the Lord – once foundationally, and then many times experientially. If you did not read and understand his last sentence as I understand him, he is saying that when the church deviates from biblical truth it, the church, has taken over the church, and that that should never happen. The problem then is that the church has fallen into the hands of the church, which it has presently and on many other occasions and in many ways over the millennia.

If we don’t take care of the church according to His instructions, the Lord will take care of us in His own way, so don’t despair. But woe to those who lead the church astray – Matt. 18:7; Luke 17:1-2. And don’t misinterpret His patience as being tolerant of such sin. “There should not be any ownership of the Church other than her Author -- God.”

1. “I dream of a better tomorrow, where chickens can cross the road and not be questioned about their motives.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson.
2. Someone said, “When wives lose their sweetness, they are fierce things to come in contact with.” I definitely do not recall who said that.
3. We have just come through Easter, with its strong remembrances of the Lord’s death and resurrection and ascension. Now we are studying the Lord’s equipping of the church – the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, repentance, powerful preaching about Jesus, equally powerful results, focus on Jesus, love for the Scriptures [all of which spoke of Jesus Christ], and believers dying to self and coming alive as a unit -- Christ’s body.

It occurs to me that the very things that the Church received, and has received in many outpourings of the Holy Spirit over the past 2,000 years, are today considered by the church to be too strong and ungentlemanly. What a disaster!! The glory of the Lord was shown in each of those outpourings, despite the frailty of the saints involved. Church life became normal for a change; not like today. Prayers were powerful and personal and Spirit-led. The gifts of the Spirit were functional. Signs and wonders flowed. The meetings lasted for hours, with almost everyone staying longer after the final “Amen.” Few today have knowledge of such normalcy even though it is in the Bible and in books on the church’s history.

1. I continue to hear a focus, which is: Don’t be deceived, don’t fall with those of this growing apostasy. I know that apostasy should be no problem to us [of all people, certainly not me!!], because the Lord’s basics have been solidly established among us for years. But my concern continues because deception is very deceptive. I have confidence in us, but some encouragement never hurts. So, some encouragement: 1) Receive and live the truth [meaning don’t spin sin and don’t let your ears be tickled by anyone]. 2) Love one another with pure hearts fervently [pure hearts are aware of others’ sins and weaknesses, yet can deal with those facts without developing an adverse attitude]. 3) Our ongoing relationship with the Lord Jesus will increase our simplicity and purity of devotion to Him. 4) Stand for the truth in love in times of ease and of tribulation. 5) Keep your peace.

In Luke 11 Jesus was preaching and performing miracles. A “woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed.’ But He said, ‘On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.’” That is my desire for you. That is the reason for this article, hearing and observing God’s word as spoken to you.

Now, about deception and the present falling away from God’s established ways. While believers around the world are watching and waiting for the Lord Jesus’ return, the devil is preparing the planet for the Antichrist. But, not to worry. Instead, be aware and prepared. Evil is already at an all-time high, and few seem to be aware of it. It will get worse. Like an evil fisher of men, the devil is using all manner of lures to catch the ignorant and unwary, both believers and unbelievers. He is shaking foundations that were set up from the beginning, still making promises that he has never kept, and setting up new and attractive “normals” with severe consequences for noncompliance. His purpose: Total apostacy and depravity of humanity so that, when the time is right, his man, the Antichrist, can bring the world together under Satan’s rule.

Apostasy is defined as a total falling away from one’s belief, whether religious, political or otherwise. That sounds like a broad enough definition, but it is actually too narrow to cover our need today. A more accurate and full definition is that apostasy is a falling away from any established state of being, from things firmly established, from ancient basic ways – especially from ways that have “always been.” The main point of this definition is obvious, that another person other than mankind would have had to set the established state of being that has “always been.” That “other person” is God.

In the beginning, man was perfect. Have you ever taken a few years to mull over and get a feel for what it would be for you to “be perfect?” Then we chose another way of life, which alienated us from our God. It did not look so very bad; we went from being perfectly good to simply doing what was right after due and reasonable personal consideration. Right was whatever we decided was right, and we even allowed others to decide what was right for them – with ever-expanding limits. We established our own rules for personal and social order. As apostates we became corrupt perverts, depraved; so depraved that when our Redeemer came among us to restore us to our God we rejected our redemption and we rejected Him.

Our Redeemer had said, “I am the Way.” That really stirred our depravity, and still does. He lived His words openly among us for three years. A few of us saw that He truly was the way of life, the way everyone was to be. The way He talked and lived was the way everyone was to talk and live. He presented the truth, and the truth was that all are to be and do like He was and did. He even promised that He would enable us to be and do like He was and did. But for that to happen, we would have to admit that our way was wrong, and that we needed to trust Him to return us to normal.

With that information and the story of Jesus in mind, how could it be that fallen man, who has killed our Redeemer, could yet be redeemed on a grand scale? It is possible because the Redeemer’s plan is to let His creation [humanity and the devil] take our best shot first, before we either repent or face our judgement without excuse. That has not yet happened. But, the Creator and His work are not finished.

Yes, the story did not end with Jesus’ work of 2,000 years ago and its invisible continuation by faith since that first coming. He will come again as the next step in the redemption of His creation. It is before that second coming that we will experience and are experiencing THE apostasy, which is the subject of this lesson. The world’s worst is yet to come. Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 about the departure from all truth before Jesus returns. When you read them, recognize in those verses the magnitude of the total departure to come, not only many believers’ departure from Jesus, but of the departure of the unredeemed world from simple reason.

Jude wrote in verses 17 to 25 about the worldly-minded mockers and dividers during the end times. He wrote with a broadness that goes beyond things religious. And Paul wrote in his second letter to Timothy [3:1-5] that in the last days things will be difficult. Although no type of sin will be new, sin will be more intense and broadly disseminated, and righteousness will be punished by civil governments.

Those scriptures point to a full breadth and depth of apostasy, not just in the church. The apostasy comes because of the weakness of the church because we have turned away from biblical truth and sacrificial love. Our weakness results in problems for the entire world, not only for the church, because we are God’s light in the world. We, who have been enabled to catch our souls up with that which the Lord has done in our Spirit, will be burning more brightly in the world’s and church’s coming darkness.

That darkness is upon us. We are in it. Let me make a short list of the matters of our present darkness. You check yourself on how many of them you are justifying, even partly. Entire orders of things are being shaken and many social structures destroyed by anarchy. There is rebellion in all areas, reversal of the definitions of sin and righteousness and of simple right and wrong, rejection of the idea of sin, reversal and confusion of sexual identity, same-sex “marriage,” self-justification on the basis of one’s personal desires and ideas, licentiousness such as men using women’s bathrooms and showers (and vs.) on the basis of individual preference of sexual identity, men refusing to rule over women, parents not forming family life, women ruling over men and children ruling over parents, employees ruling over employers, church leaders refusing to live and preach the gospel and to lead their flocks accordingly, lying as being smart and wise behavior (unless you get caught), the taking of young human life in and out of the womb, euthanasia at any age, all forms of authority and order and institutions challenged and overturned by anarchy (actually, a lack of governing), students running colleges, free speech being denied in the name of free speech, the approval of homosexuality and of unrighteous heterosexuality, theft being approved and legalized on the basis of one person having more than another person (or “more than he needs”), greed being approved and legalized on the basis of one person or group having more power than the other, lying-stealing-deceptive scams of all sorts, identity theft, computer hacking and theft, suing gun manufacturers when guns are used in robberies, suing pharmaceutical companies when people become addicted to drugs, law enforcement agencies refusing to enforce laws either because they fear the mob or because they disagree with the laws, jailing parents for [even properly] spanking their children, altering human genes including inserting animal genes onto human chromosomes, wanting justice and mercy for ourselves but allowing the opposite for those we dislike or don’t care about, faked resumes by those running for public office, lying spirits available to those who seek spiritual things for spirituality sake, occult practices no longer being kids’ games, and on and on.

The point is that we have deserted our long-standing normalcy and institutions, the foundations of which were originally laid by the Lord, even though many of the foundational customs and institutions long ago lost their religious roots, spiritual life, power, and testimony of a Living God. The devil’s plan is to reduce the gospel, increase sin, load the culture with iniquity, and therefore have a free hand when he presents the Antichrist to a world ready to counter the kingdom of God. The church was responsible for laying and maintaining our foundations, but has become silent and has even joined our ambient culture. That leaves us nothing to say to our culture, and what little we may want to say is so weak that we are ignored. It is no surprise, therefore, that the church also has little to say to itself, especially when residual truth is sugar coated and whispered ever so softly. The cross has now become something for only one person to bear, that one person having been Jesus. We have been “dumbed down,” duped by the enemy into being blessing-seeking religious wimps. No wonder that the world is running away from us instead of coming for answers.

Question: How are we to come to the truth when we are so deceived, are surrounded by deception, and the cost of righteousness is so high? Answer: The Truth must come to us.

Question: How can the dead hear even if the truth comes to us? Answer: The Truth-Teller must bring the Spirit, who has the power to change hearts and open eyes and ears.

Question: But has He not already come to us and brought the Spirit!? Answer: Yes, and He will come again. But not only will Jesus come for His people, He is sending men and women who have the truth and the Spirit. They are going into the world as the lights of the world. Revival is being granted.

Lesson: King Solomon had built the temple; the glory of the Lord had come into it. Then the Lord told him, “.. I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. [But when you turn from Me and My ways, and go your wicked ways .. – ed.] If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land” – 2 Chron. 7:12-14.

In the 2,000 years of church history the Lord has done exactly that from time to time and from place to place. He is now watching and listening. He hears from heaven, forgives sins, and heals lands – restoring the normalcy of biblical Christianity. But in many times and places He has not heard, forgiven, or healed, although He stretches out His arms and offers Himself. Jesus is still being offered.

Let me outline the progression of our present apostasy, the progression which grey heads among us can easily remember, and others who are educated in recent and current history have studied: 1) God’s word was questioned, replacing it with reason, science and freedom of thought. 2) The doctrine of sin was removed; even the word “sin” itself, from our culture, social debate, and from the freed and enlightened church. 3) Overt unrighteousness was promoted as “choice,” and laws were changed to allow for perverted thought, actions, and life-styles. 4) [And this is the stage that is now being developed] Laws have been put forward to punish resistance to, even verbal disagreement with, the apostasy.

Look up. In the midst of this deception and apostasy wonderful things are happening. Multitudes are turning to the Lord every day, most numerously in Moslem countries. The world is in a state of accelerating change in all ways, including in righteousness and unrighteousness. The Lord is with us and He is “at hand” in regards to His and our ultimate victory.

1. In the very natural, I was born again before I knew what I was doing, I committed my life to the Lord too intensely and broadly, I made too many mistakes all along the way to be of value to God or man, and my life has gone just the way I planned it. None of that is true, but I was thinking that such hog wash might be occurring to you. Don’t you believe it. No one knew what he/she was doing when they accepted the Lord, in no way can we overcommit our lives to the Lord, mistakes are bad but are part of the necessary process and are productive, and no one’s life can be self-planned ahead of time when we sell out to the Lord.
2. America’s founding fathers knew that political power is most safely entrusted to those who have something better to do. They wanted those who were successful in the workplace to be leaders in the new nation’s government. Those who wanted most to be governmental leaders were mostly left out, or were watched closely in the offices they were granted. They did not want the old saying to be fulfilled, that “Those who can, do; those who can’t, teach.” In their case, “teach” would be changed to “rule,” so they worked to avoid placing into office those who preferred to rule over others before they had learned to rule over themselves by being successful in the marketplace.
3. In Genesis 4:10, speaking of Abel’s death at the hands of Cain, the Lord told Cain that Abel’s blood was crying to Him from the ground. The word “blood” is actually in the pleural, as “bloods.” Abel’s bloods were crying out to the Lord from the ground. Spiritually [spiritual things being the only eternal reality], the as-yet unformed ones were to be from the same primordial material of Adam. They existed in God’s mind as if they had already been born. – Gen. 2:7; 3:19. Cain had not only killed Abel; he had cut off Abel’s as-yet unborn offspring from the earth. That multiplied Cain’s sin logarithmically.

That speaks to us, also. The ripple effect of our righteousnesses [and our sins] is hard for us to appreciate more than perhaps only 2 or 3 people-ripples away from our action. But when we save someone’s life, or lead someone to the Lord, the ripple effect is unending. Lay up those rewards. It is true that Jesus Himself is our reward, as He is to Abraham – Gen. 15:1 [KJV]. But Jesus, the greatest promoter of rewards, wants us to know that there will be major [all good] differences between our situations in the hereafter because of our individually earned rewards – Matt. 5:12, 46; 6:1; 10:41-42; Luke 6:23, 35; Rev. 3:21; etc.

1. Biblical literacy among American Christians is reported to be 1 in 10, in millennials it is 1 in 20. The reported helpfulness of Scripture to Christians depends on our degree of submission to it/God. That requires an intimate relationship with the Lord, which in turn places His written word in the category of a love letter to us. In due time that results in resurrection life.
2. The Lord often places us in obscurity in order to do His major works in our souls. Moses spent 40 years being transformed from the one who may have been the next Pharaoh of Egypt into being the meekest man in the world, fit then to lead God’s people. Likewise, David learned to be God’s leader by being a shepherd boy, the least son in his family. Coming from humble beginnings, or being set aside by the Lord for some necessary humiliation, is common. Have you noticed His process in your life?
3. Who was Israel’s greatest king, David or Solomon? That’s a difficult question to answer, but your answer can tell you something about yourself. David had a shepherd’s heart, with actions accordingly. He was a warrior-shepherd. He was the apple of God’s eye. Solomon was wise. He was a good administrator. The kingdom spread widely and had peace under his rule. Scripture is careful to show both’s weaknesses and their chastisements, without rejection by the Lord.
4. Information is for the purpose of our transformation, then to inform others for their transformation. Information can be so great, so outstanding, so exciting, so informative that we can lose track of its primary purpose – transformation of our minds and lives.
5. We grieve more for others sins and misfortunes when we see our own hands [or the lack of our hands] in the creation of their situations. Our attitudes improve when we properly go to their assistance.
6. What are some indicators of a person living the resurrected life? To start the answer, the resurrected life is a changed life in the person and from the lives of most of those around him. Courage is another, which could be called the attitude of a living martyr. Courageous people “waste” time, effort, funds, and their lives for purposes beyond themselves.

Fear is the enemy of courage. Fear causes us to be quiet and to stay uninvolved because we see there is a price to be paid for stepping forward. The resurrected life shows that we are indeed part of the divine nature [2 Pet. 1:4], that we have already passed from death into life.

Other characteristics of the resurrected life are that we renounce things like ungodliness, retaliation, divisiveness, and unbiblical theologies. We become generous of our time, effort, and possessions. We forgive sins, so it is easier to be united with the unforgiven, which makes us coworkers with Christ as He builds His church. Forgivers of sins also find it easier to trust God and humanity.

All of those things allow Him who indwells us to reproduce His resurrected life in others.

1. In Jerusalem, Israel, there is a church that has “always” kept a rooster. The church is called St Peter Gallicantu, and is thought to be built over the remains of the High Priest Caiaphas’ palace. Peter’s triple rejection of Jesus before the rooster crowed twice took place in the courtyard of the High Priest’s house – Mark 14:30. “Gallicantu” means “cock’s-crow.”

The Lord is watching over you. Trust Him. There are no accidents.