THOUGHTS OF FEBRUARY, 2014

1. We Christians are certainly very different, aren’t we! True that we are the same in every basic way, but we are different in the amount of every basic way. Some of us are very patient and kind, seeming to possess those virtues naturally; others of us work diligently to be patient and kind, with variable results. None are perfect in any aspect of soul, and none are absolutely imperfect in every aspect – although our experience may tempt us to believe otherwise. There is room for disagreement.

We have had so many different factors at work in our lives. Some become broken before God [that’s good], some broken only before man [that’s not good], and some not broken at all. Some persistently resist God’s work in them, refusing to die to certain habits or relationships, even while acknowledging God’s hand upon them. Theirs seems like another Pharaoh experience.

At times I see the same things working in my soul, not to my surprise.

2. Some Christians have a difficult time with Scripture that speaks of and shows God’s anger and says He hates. We have had a partial or lop-sided view of the All-Mighty. For some He is a sugar daddy, ready to give us whatever we ask for and to do our bidding to keep us happy.

 For others He is a mean ogre who delights in beating on us [see NOTE below]. We see His instructions to the Jews in the Old Testament to wipe from the surface of the earth every man, woman and child of certain tribes, and feel relieved that “the God of the Old Testament has changed for His betterment.” We spin Jesus’ encounter in the temple with the money changers when He beat them with a whip, and certainly don’t accept that we should be like Him in that way. Some don’t believe in a literal hell, because “a loving God would never put someone in such a place, much less forever.” I say, “Just read Scripture and believe.”

Remember that the Author of Scripture lives in every believer, and that the important personal process in this life is that of being formed into His likeness. That which He loves we are to love, and that which He hates we are to hate. We cannot know the Lord at any depth if we are not open to His truth and accept His revelation of Himself. Holy love and holy hatred go hand in hand. Both are of God and are powerful motivators. See Psalm 45:6-7 and Hebrews 1:9, and many other places in Scripture.

NOTE: This from A.H.: “I struggled with the teaching about God punishing us when we do not repent of our sins. I imagined at the time that the Great Cosmic Policeman was ready to crush me for the slightest misdemeanor. Then I learned that His punishment is always proportional and for our good. The Lord demonstrated this very graphically and completely. A young friend got a board game of Battle Star Gallactica for Christmas and we were playing. I cheated when throwing the dice. The Lord told me to confess it to the other boys. I ‘could not’ do it because it was so humiliating. He then said, ‘OK, I am going to punish you.’ I lost the next three games hopelessly. I imagined I would never win another board game for the rest of my life. He then said, ‘OK, that is your punishment; it’s over.’ I won the next game in three moves.” The Lord is loving and His punishments are just.

3. Paul wrote in Galatians 1:16 that it was God’s purpose to reveal Jesus in him. It says that God “.. was pleased to reveal His Son in me, ..” I think we can try and try, and fail and fail, and apparently succeed and apparently succeed without Christ being revealed in us. If we try to be like Jesus we end with the same results as Paul in Romans 7:14-25 – wanting and tying to do good but failing in action and/or attitude.

Paul saw that he was no longer under the” law of trying,” but now under the “law of believing.” He saw that by faith he could trust the Lord to change him into the likeness of Jesus Who was alive within him. He saw that it was God’s doing that he was chosen to be in Christ Jesus [Eph. 2:8-9], and that Christ Jesus was his wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption – 1 Cor. 1:30.

Paul received, accepted, and believed the truth that he did not need to try for those things but that Jesus had already become those things in him. So, Paul relaxed and trusted Jesus to be those to, in and through him.

4. Here are some serious Thoughts. When you are ill, pray for the strength to be faithful throughout your illness. When you are low on finances, pray to be generous throughout your shortage. When the boss gives you more than you can handle, pray for what you need to handle it. When friends fail you, pray for the character to not fail them.

In all of those ordeals you will be the miracle worked by the Lord and probably will be noticed by some of those around you [all placed there by the Lord] for eternal effect.

5. An earthly but noteworthy view of history is that it is the unfolding of miscalculations. That not only applies to world history, but to individual history. Some say that we learn nothing except by error first. Thomas Edison is said to have made over 1,000 failed light bulbs before he was successful. He said that he learned something important every failure. American historian Barbara W. Tuchman [1912-1989] is credited with giving us the above definition. The perfect definition of history is that it is the unfolding of God’s plans for men and all creation by the revelation of Himself.

Some further information on B. W. T.: She twice was awarded the Pulitzer prize for General Non-Fiction, which points to her abilities as a writer. As a historian, it was said that over her writing years she made the “unhappy transition from writing history as a moral lesson to writing moral lessons as history.” I take due note of that bit of information.

6. We are called to holiness and unity, not to separation from unbelievers, because we are sent to unbelievers wherever they are. Righteous separation is reserved for us in relation to believers who have severely backslidden, and then only after a heart-rending process among the righteous who try to restore the backslider.

7. Jean-Jacques Rousseau [1712-1778], Genevan philosopher and writer, wrote, “Too often reason deceives us … but conscience never deceives.” Reason does easily deceive us, but less-so when our minds have been biblically trained. Similarly, conscience can deceive us unless we are both biblically trained and are sensitive to the Holy Spirit. At that point, we are still not perfectly oriented to the Truth, due to the frailties of our flesh [self-will, pride, etc.].

8. Another good definition of character: “Character is the ability to carry out a good resolution long after the excitement of the moment has passed.” – Cavett Robert [1907-1997], American lawyer and professional speaker.

9. I have said in THOUGHTS several times, and in person often, that nothing is original with me. It all comes from someone else. I read lots, and take note of basics that I enjoy passing along to you. Some things come to me directly from the Lord, but my hearing, understanding, and appreciating of those things result from the input into my soul that many others have had – all through God’s customized grace to me – which is true for each of you, also. Thus, I appreciate my many tutors, almost all of whom I have never known, a situation which, for most of them, will be corrected on that homecoming day.

Anyway, most of the sources of my Thoughts were never identifiable, their being historical, generic or unrecognizable by the time they came to me. In the case of some of the more recognizable ones which have not received credit, I will claim that “Originality is the fine art of remembering what you hear but forgetting where you heard it.” – Laurence J. Peter [1919-1990], Canadian-American educator and publisher of the Peter Principle, which, as you know, says that “In a hierarchy every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence … in time every post tends to be occupied by an employee who is incompetent to carry out its duties … Work is accomplished by those employees who have not yet reached their level of incompetence.”

There are many wise and perceptive sayings that well-describe life in the natural. However, the Peter Principal does not apply to life in the Spirit, where the supply of information and performance is endless. If that is true, it is a challenging truth. It leaves no [little?] room for retirement from the field of Life.

L. J. P. also said that the “noblest of all dogs is the hot-dog; it feeds the hand that bites it.”

10. “You are remembered for the rules you break.” – Douglas MacArthur [1880-1964], General of the Army (U. S.), (the only) Field Marshall of the Philippine Army, Metal of Honor recipient, awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (twice) and the Silver Star (seven times), and Supreme Commander for the Allied Forces in Japan during its occupation and reconstruction after World War II.

The General’s quote was not meant to give everyone a free-hand to break the rules, but to encourage those who know better than to follow prewritten rules when uncommon tests come. Our prime example is Jesus, who is still best known by the Jews for breaking Jewish rules of theology and life, for which He was crucified. Rules are good and necessary, and as such they prevent the continual destruction that can be caused by loose cannons. But, there are no rules that are meant to be never broken. That’s a stretchy statement, is it not? I may not get final confirmation on that until I get Home.

NOTE of a few days later: Even the most clear and understandable of God’s rules have not yet been understood [stretched by the Holy Spirit] to their fullest obedient extent. When the Holy Spirit stretches us while truly obeying a rule, it may appear to others that we are breaking it. But the better rubber bands can be stretched far beyond that of the older ones, without being broken.

11. Question: Is it easier on a person to experience the joys and pains commonly associated with the teenage years when they are in their later years, or when they are in their teenage years? God knows, and He is our Master Architect. My observations do not answer my question.

Many of us do not grow up until we are in our 30s, 50s or never. I started growing up at age 33, when the Lord baptized me in the Holy Spirit and put me together with four other similarly baptized brothers. Following the Lord into that group relationship was the best decision I have ever made. No; probably the second best. Marrying Nancy has to have been my best.

I’m still growing up.

12. Have you made the same observation that I have, that pew-sitting saints of our various denominations have little or no difficulty having brotherly fellowship with one another, but that the clergy do? There seems to be something of a hindrance among the clergy.

 I’ll venture to say that the leaders of other types of life’s endeavors do not have that sort of problem. Physicians of different specialties easily enjoy one another. Scientists meet and share easily and eagerly. Engineers do the same. Farmers are relaxed and friendly in all levels. But clergy have and maintain some sort of barrier. Yet, the Lord of all commands us to love one another, which calls for self to die and Christ to arise in us. That depth of love is that we love them as we love ourselves.

13. The world system is going downhill, just like Daniel and other Old Testament seers saw and said it would. That is not a doom and gloom statement, because we are citizens of God’s system that is on the upswing and are here on assignment in this world. He is in total control, has mapped out His plan, and is directing it perfectly.

Many of our eternal brothers and sisters around the world are currently living in their local brands of the world system and it is as bad as it can get for them. They are being starved and murdered by the hundreds and thousands. That will increase, including in our local world systems.

Part of the indication that our world systems are poised for more of the same is found in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which states: “Rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purpose and principles of the United Nations.” If one is world oriented, that declaration is bad news. If one is kingdom of God oriented, it is another indication that the King is about to return and do what He said He would do on Planet Earth.

First we must suffer, but for a little while – 1 Pet. 5:6-11.

14. We are fortunate to have a loving creator. One of the remarkable details in our construction is that we have many built-in warning systems. Of course, we can override our warning systems, and sometimes do, but they are there for our protection.

Examples: 1) Hunger tells us that we should take on some fuel. If we ignore that alarm it will eventually turn off. Those who are in advanced stages of starvation lose their sense of hunger. 2) An urgent, full sensation in certain parts of our body tells us it is dump time. Ignoring that signal is precarious at least socially. 3) Perspiring heavily while working in hot weather reminds us that we should take in more fluids. When that backup alarm turns off, meaning when we stop perspiring, that is a signal that we are in real danger from fluid loss. 4) Chest pain is a common alarm about a possible heart attack. Ignoring that alarm puts our life in immediate danger. 5) Etc., etc.

Then there are the warning signs in our souls: 1) Spiritual hunger tells us we should be feeding at the Holy Trough. Ignoring that warning leads to a diminished desire to feed on the Bread of Life. 2) An urge to get before God [and man?] to confess a sin [dump] should be responded to, lest that sin rise up in a more painful arena. 3) Fear is a common alarm that tells us we have entered into a condition of unbelief in regards to the Lord’s presence, love, purpose and ability. 4) Worry is an important alarm because it tells us we have gotten into God’s work area; into His business in our or another’s life. We may wrongly respond to worry by continuing in our worry [thinking “it’s just natural to worry”] or by “doing something!” to make us or others feel better [such as “at least I did the best I could”]. Worry is not to be confused with having a God-given burden. Burdens properly carried produce life. Worry cannot be properly carried and always produces death.

We are fortunate. Pay attention to your warning systems of body and soul.

15. Ordinarily, good judgment results in good experiences. But the Lord who runs all things according to His superb wisdom, knowledge and love knows when it is best for us to eat grass [Dan. 4:28-37] or to sit in the sun instead of in the shade at times [Jonah 4].

Another wise man, although not in the same league as the Lord, said: “I learned that good judgment comes from experience and that experience grows out of mistakes.” – General Omar Bradley [1893-SteveSWar II, the last of only 9 people to hold 5-star rank.

Jonah and Nebuchadnezzar understood God’s working in their lives and came to good judgment through the school of failure. How are you doing? Watch out for toxic shame and self-condemnation.

16. There is a tension between teaching our children what to think and how to think. That strain also goes on in school, politics, and probably almost all settings. It is a temptation to tell our kids what to think, do and say because when they think, do or say wrongly we can quickly jump to imprint correct behaving, doing and saying in their minds. But if we do not teach them how to think, how to come to the right conclusions, and how to move into the right actions we put them at risk for secluded youthfulness, leaving them ill-equipped for facing the peer pressures of college and later years. It takes time and effort and patience to teach different decision-making in the formative years, and it is so very enticing to simply command conformity.

17. Christians have the Holy Spirit within them, so when they hear a still, small voice within saying something, they seriously consider that that voice is the Lord. Of course, it could be self or our ex-father, the devil. That has to be worked out from voice to voice.

If one is not a Christian [even if in regular attendance at church], that inner voice can be only oneself [not always bad] or the devil [always bad but not always appearing bad].

Consider the above in the case of Vincent Van Gogh [1853-1890], Dutch artist, who said: “If you hear a voice within you say, ‘You cannot paint,’ then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced.” His early adult years were marked by zeal to be a Christian missionary, and his later years by considerable unchristian behavior. I’m glad he painted but I also wonder how he would have served the Lord as a minister of the Word.

18. “Democracy is the recurrent suspicion that more than half of the people are right more than half of the time.” -- E. B. White [1899-1985], American writer. The kingdom of God has the recurrent assurance that more than half of the people are wrong more than half of the time, but that when we are united in Christ’s love we can come to the mind of Christ.

19. We who have been free for most of our lives are [and should be] habitually free. There should not be any need for us to continually check to see if our chains are still on us.

Then, there are those who are still in chains, who long to be free. The power of freedom is within their reach only if it is brought to them. The key to their chains is the gospel message of Jesus and has been placed in our hands.