THOUGHTS OF JANUARY, 2018

1. The trivium [Latin: “the place where three roads meet.”] is a method of learning developed in ancient Greece, in which the young student learns in coincidence with the natural stages of his/her mental development. It comprises grammar, logic, and rhetoric [input, process, and output]. First is the grammar of learning, taught during the parrot stage of life, during which students willingly memorize fundamentals that will be foundational for subsequent thought. The next stage is when the growing student begins to question things. That’s when they are taught to make logically sound arguments. In the third stage of the growing child they are taught the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing. Alterations of the trivium have taken various forms in Britain and America.

The trivium was/is requisite for the study of the quadrivium [arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy]. We get our word “trivial” from the simpler trivium compared to the more difficult quadrivium. It seems to me that there is a good, basic method there, of the student progressing in education according to his/her mental development – not a new idea at all. Jesus was aware of the need for such timing in the spiritual development of His disciples – John 16:12-15. Paul also – 1 Cor. 3:1-2, and as did the writer of Hebrews 5:11 -> 6:2.

As a mother of five said, “Don’t give them more than they can grasp and process.” When one of her youngest asked, “Mom, where do baby calves come from?” she replied, “The mother cow goes ‘m-o-o”’ and the calf comes running out of the bushes.” That settled it for that child, until the next time he would ask; then would come the quadrivium.

1. Jesus accomplished God’s eternal purpose – Eph. 3:11. Think about that. That which was purposed by God, and was patiently (?) worked on for ages, was accomplished by Jesus Christ of Nazareth 2,000 years ago. It is finished. The Lord has rescued creation – humanity and otherwise, and restored us to our original position and calling and ability and etc. It is finished; mostly invisibly finished, except by the informed eyes of faith – that variable reality by which believers live.

“The finish” is what Jesus walked in as a man. He walked by faith in His Father’s perfect will and grace for Him, as we are to walk, also. On the cross He finished that stage of creation’s redemption that He had already finished by faith.

The good news is better than we thought. That which was totally lost is restored. That which was totally evil is totally restored. It is done. We can rest on that even while we are putting the shine to it. And what a love story! The more we see Christ’s work as “finished,” the more we manifest it as finished. Yes, I know that the earthly expression of His finished work is not yet visible in the natural, but that too is just around the corner of time.

1. I know that you pray to our Father in Jesus’ name, and receive in return – John 15:16. We know that our Father delights in answering the prayers of those who love and obey His Son. Therefore, we pray to our Father through Jesus, and He deals with us through Jesus. But how do you pray to Jesus in Jesus’ name – John 14:14? It also has to do with how completely we identify with being one with Christ, our elder brother. If our identity of being one with and in Him is solid, it will be like being in the space station as opposed to outside of it. We are “in” Him, and all else is as nothing and death. He is our life, our oxygen, our breath. We who are inside have a togetherness that is totally dependent on Him and one another. In is our whole life, with a secure lifeline to the throne, as with the early astronauts when they said, “Houston, we have a problem.” And Houston solved the problem for those who were in the satellite.
2. The best way to recognize a lie is to already know the truth. Basically, that means, “study your Bible.” That not only gives us the truth but aligns our thought processes with the truth. Then, listen to the Holy Spirit. He gives us applications, directions, cautions and encouragements. He says, “stand,” “run,” “fight,” and the like. The truth and the Spirit dispel lies and fears.

None of the above makes us infallible [although it could], but at least we don’t fall for the latest big lie, such as abortion on demand, government can fix our problems, more money will fix our social problems, get religion out of our schools – religious lies or otherwise lies. But remember, if we read our Bibles and do not live accordingly, we set ourselves up for deceptions. We will already be deceiving ourselves, so will agree with deceptions as they are offered to us.

1. Jesus was killed as a [seemingly] weak man and a [seemingly] weak God. Yet, that entire process was a display of powerful man-God strength. He was crucified in yielded-into weakness, yet processed the ordeal in strength. We are weak in Him, but we live with Him in the power of God – 2 Cor. 13:4. Perhaps the major process we are experiencing is the minimization of ourselves so that Jesus Christ can increase in us. His increase is [at this time] not often shown as flesh power, but as strong humility. When under fire the humility hangs in there, increasing Him and diminishing us. It shows in heaven and on earth, but is usually more understood and appreciated in heaven.
2. There are those times! We did not need to yield ourselves into the hands of those who would hurt us. We knew that we did not need to yield to them because they were wrong and we were in the right! They were evil; we were clean and probably could have stood our ground and won in court and in the court of public opinion. But the Spirit within said, “Turn your cheek, agree with your brother, allow yourself to be defrauded, don’t resist and don’t retort.” There are those times!

Those are the “unfair” times when the righteous are given over to the unrighteous to be despised, rejected, betrayed, forsaken, condemned, and crucified. The unrighteous must have their hour – Luke 22:53(b). It may be a light matter, or it may be the full force of evil, when evil is allowed to do all it can. But we know the end result; we will be raised in triumph.

In much of our lives we receive God’s instructions and find God’s grace to avoid such times, but the times come when we are to yield into evil’s hands, knowing that we could escape! Those are times of advances into Jesus’ character, when Light and Life come forth to the glory of God. Those times bring un-losable rewards which are stored up for us in eternity. Don’t be afraid to lose at those times. Let your light shine. Lay down on that cross; the one that you have been carrying with you daily for use in such an opportunity. The day is close when all of your tears will be wiped away.

1. The disciples were accustomed to being sent out ahead of Jesus. They went when and where He directed, they knew He would come, and they knew that powerful things would happen when He got there. Those things even began to happen through them as they went. They believed, they obeyed, and He came in the power of the Holy Spirit. I have not really wondered if any one of the disciples ever gave thought to going somewhere else, like Jonah, in the other direction. Likely not, although thoughts may have occurred to them like, “Uncle Ezekiel and Aunt Rebecca sure would like to hear the kingdom message, and they need it, too. Besides, they are highly respected in their village and are leaders in the synagogue. The news of the kingdom would probably start a revival there, and God wants everyone revived, doesn’t He? Maybe I should go to them instead.”

They may have thought of that, but that sort of thinking is mainly left to us who serve Jesus after His physical presence has been removed from us. Now we need to discern the mind of Christ, the we being the corporate body of Christ wherein we reside and share our all – Acts 15:25; 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 2:10. Otherwise, we are headless or many-headed, which does not present a one-King and one-kingdom picture of Christ and His kingdom. Our presentation of His kingdom is good news because it is the truth about Israel’s Messiah. It is also good news because He is the source of peace and unity in the world, starting with us who already believe in Him.

So, they had Him with them, and we have “only” His invisible presence and often silent voice, plus timely nudges, pats, and “coincidences.” With that great difference tilted strongly toward the natural at that time, Jesus told them and us that the less physical evidence we have, and the more we trust and obey from whatever He provides by faith, the more blessed we are – John 20:29. As believers, our flesh still desires as much leading in the natural as we can get. That means signs and wonders and logical guidance – 1 Cor. 1:22-25. Right? That is true for me, but He offers better.

That is why the reality of the Body of Christ is so important. That body needs to “feel” as Christ, “think” as Christ, “speak” as Christ, “act” as Christ, and “live integrated as one” as Christ. We are

only one body, despite our many self-inflicted injuries and attempted amputations. The unregenerate world looks at Christians and Christian groups and sees only religious people doing religious things. They see our naturalness and, because they are natural minded, understand our naturalness very easily. They don’t see spiritually because they cannot. The lived gospel changes that for those who are chosen, but almost everyone recognizes real love.

It must be said, again and again, that our differences of all sorts are essential for the development and display of reality – the love of God. Commonality does not allow for the display of love nearly as much as do our differences.

What prevents [meaning “What has gotten into your mind, and blocks ..”] .. your living in the mind of Christ where you abide? It is we who have the mind of Christ for me. The kingdom life and order and spiritual clarity are available to who-so-ever will become such a member of Christ’s body.

1. John certainly got it right in the Revelation 1:9-10. Most scholars agree that he wrote this book about 95 A.D. That was 25 years after Rome had destroyed the temple and scattered the Jews across the empire, halting animal sacrifice for the Jews. It was also a long 62 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, and He had not yet returned. Persecutions, the tool of God for cleansing and strengthening His church, were underway as Roman authorities were beginning to enforce emperor worship. In the natural, things were not going well for God’s people. But John’s calling and situation were of God.

So, John was in trouble. I don’t know why Rome decided to exile him. Why not execute him and put an end to his troublemaking? Rome, and God, had their reasons. And I don’t know if John initially knew that it was the Lord who was exiling him to Patmos. It was so obvious that the Romans were doing it. Somewhere between the beginning and the end of John’s ordeal on Patmos he came to the knowledge that it was the Lord who had placed him there, and that the Lord had imposed or overlaid His plan on Rome’s puny plan. God’s purpose was far beyond anything that Rome had considered: “I, John, .. was on the island called Patmos because of [‘to receive’ – ed.] the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”

My semi-educated guess is that John already knew the Lord was with him wherever he went, including as he was being taken to Patmos, and knew that the Lord would always be with him, but that the specific reason for his being exiled there was not known to him until he encountered Jesus and experienced the revelation. John’s faithfulness in “the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance” [Rev. 1:9] was a spiritual tune-up to qualify him for the revelation, its publication, and its distribution into our hands. The first thing Jesus said to him was “Write in a book what you [‘will’ -- ed.] see, and send it to the churches” – Rev. 1:11.

Jesus’ handiwork in John’s soul began showing in big ways from the beginning of the revelation. As we read it we notice that at times John could hardly take in what he saw. He did a magnificent job of remembering all of that one revelation, didn’t he? But he was not, nor are we, alone in the matter of memory. As Jesus had told him and the other disciples, the Holy Spirit would be their memory bank – Mark 13:9-11. No, John was not alone, and was not alone in his task to see, understand, remember, and write that long and highly unusual book. I’m confident that at times he felt over his head in the project. He was experiencing another wilderness! But right there in a place of aloneness, darkness, dryness, and “again-ness!” he became the Builder’s choice material for building His church. You will enjoy re-reading Hebrews 3 and 4 because they speak of the Builder [Jesus] and the material [us] that He uses or doesn’t use, based on our belief or unbelief. All believers are His material but some of us are usable for some purposes and unsuited for other purposes.

1. How did it come about that the worldwide body of believers into Christ are called the Body of Christ? To answer that question, it helps to know that it was God’s idea, not man’s. That makes the term one of the most real and personal allegories of scripture, and because it is real it is powerful. It becomes more powerful the more we believers believe it. The more we experience the reality of faith and unity, the more experiential are our lives as being, and seen-to-be, one in Christ.

A healthy head [mind] can do only as much as the body is able and disposed to do. Persons with palsy often have a good mind, but their bodies limit their doings. The mind can make a determination, but the body cannot/will not follow instructions. The body just will not do what the head would have it do. Not to limit the Lord, but it seems that among His believers we have palsy, and it is not because something is amiss in the Head. Needed: Grace for knowing and seeing that something is wrong, a diagnosis, the diagnosis accepted, acceptance of the treatment, application of the treatment, and a walk together in newness of health.

1. The church has two things that are guaranteed to keep it on track: 1) The truth and 2) the Spirit. Jesus, the author of Scripture, said that His words are truth. Where the church adheres to the Bible’s teachings it abides in the truth. The Holy Spirit was and is still given to believers in Jesus for acceptance of those words, leading to lives of power. Where the truth and the Spirit reign in the hearts of believers, there is righteousness and unity, and fleshly Phariceeism is avoided.
2. John the disciple, who became an apostle, by the Spirit labeled himself “the one whom Jesus loved” and wrote that he reclined his head on Jesus’ breast – John 13:23-25; 21:20. What a warm picture that is of man-love. Yet, it is the same two men who John wrote about in the Revelation 1:10-17. Only, this time when John saw Jesus he was overcome with fear and fell at Jesus’ feet like a dead man. The difference? John’s first 3 years of acquaintance with Jesus of Nazareth were with Him as man to man. He came to know Jesus as the Jewish messiah, which John pictured as a very warm and loving relationship. His later encounter with Jesus is pictured as John the man seeing Jesus the Creator of eternity, the Living One who is the Resurrection and the Life, and who dispenses His Life as He alone wills. It appears that John did well in both encounters.
3. In which area are you most often tested? I think my area is fear. It used to be the area of truth, but that has really faded into near nothing, as far as my insight informs me. I think that the greatest test of the church, other than love, is the truth. A failure of truth produces failed lordship of Christ, failed worship, and more untruth. As time goes by, it becomes obvious that the church has fallen into the hands of the church. Denominationalism and its theology replace its Truth and Life. The usual reason for decreased truth is the desire for immediate and visible results for getting along in this world. That never works, except deceptively and briefly.

P. J., a brother currently fulltime in a state institution of higher learning, adds that when the church is working without the pneuma [breath, Holy Spirit – ed.] of God it is suffocating itself. When the church is following the Spirit (pneuma) of God there is life. Failure to follow God generally results in “man-made air” being pumped into the body. Worldly ministry methods are man-made attempts to force air into the body of Christ when there is not enough oxygen to sustain the body. Thanks, P. J.

1. The Lord works quickly, He works slowly, and He works all speeds in between. He is the Lord and everything is on His schedule. We cannot speed Him up or slow Him down, nor can we redirect Him. He is the Lord in toto, not only in name. Yet, as He works with us, we are given to understand that He does not violate our will. There is scripture and a little song to fit the situation:

 “He does not compel us to go, No! No!

 He does not compel us to go.

 He does not compel us to go ‘gainst our will.

 He just makes us willing to go.”

For scripture to go with that chorus, which has verses, see Exodus 23:28 (20-33); Deuteronomy 7:20; and Joshua 24:12. You may remember some events when you were not willing, but in God’s time you were actually eager. Our unwillingness simply flipped to willingness by God’s grace. Some of the biggest events in my life occurred soon after [sometimes one day after] I had determined otherwise, and it didn’t hurt one bit.

1. Here is a heart-breaking and humbling bit of history on slavery. Having the fleets to sail the oceans, England was the biggest slave transporter in the world until the early 1800s. England starved and killed millions of enslaved Irish and many others. West coast African nations exported millions of slaves for profit, 5 million to the Americas and 14 million to the Middle East. The 4 million slaves freed by Americans after the Civil War have 45 million descendants. Those slaves sent to Muslim countries have virtually none; they were castrated and worked to death. This is a condensed report of a tragedy which continues today in many parts of the world.
2. Have you noticed a recent increase of preaching on repentance? Neither have I. Or of preaching on denying ourselves and taking up our crosses and following Jesus? Nope; again, neither have I. Have you wondered why? Here are some considerations: 1) Those are disturbing topics, not appropriate for the message of our God of love and joy. He wants us to be fulfilled and happy. 2) Those topics are too narrow for the broadminded, sophisticated modern church. Times, people and things have changed. 3) Those are negatives, and Christians should always be positive. It says so in the Bible, somewhere. 4) Our church leaders certainly don’t need to repent, so we just need to trust and follow them. 5) We use the word “repent” in something we read in church every Sunday morning, don’t we? 6) If God had wanted us to repent He would have told us. I have not heard Him. 7) If there is an afterlife I’m going there; if not, let’s enjoy this life. 8) Listen! My neighbor is the guy who needs to repent. I work hard and provide for my family. He’s a bum. 9) Occasionally we have some visitors at church who look like they might need to improve, but we don’t want to run them off with rude preaching. 10) Some people are unfortunate and misguided, so those are the ones who need to repent; but don’t go overboard on it. We understand them. 11) What right do we have to tell people they should repent! That would be judging them, and we always avoid using judgment. 12) Repentance is a private thing between us and the Man upstairs, if we ever sin. But I don’t sin, often, and when I do it’s not bad enough to have to repent. God understands.
3. If you told someone that they needed a good, hot shower with lots of soap, but they applied only some perfume, you know how the prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, and millions of other preachers of the gospel felt when they preached repentance. I know that the problem is not as bad as it seems, but it seems like no one [except ME, of course] appreciates and embraces repentance. But “repent” is a good word and advising it for others is a loving act. The God of love used it over and over when talking to His people in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Lord of the church is still walking among us – Rev. 1:9-13. He notices that we are proud of our selves, of our gatherings, liturgies, and piety, but are unaware of our diseased condition. In the Revelation at 3:17-18 He had some harsh words for us, yet He did not and does not now hate us. If He has been “getting on your case” lately, remember that He chastises those whom He loves so that we will pay attention and repent. That’s tough love and He knows how to use it.

1. The failure of the religious church to be Jesus’ church is obvious in itself, in its condition and consequences. But religion does not clean us. The “best” it can do is reform us a bit. But repenting and accepting our cross-walk does the job that our Manufacturer designed for us. The results of His cleansings are that our spotless white robes [the imputed righteousness of Christ given us when we were born again] are quickly returned to newness when we have soiled them. That works good things for us day by day, and keeps us in proper clothing for a wedding feast that is coming soon.

All born again believers have received His invitation to attend the wedding feast of His Son -- [Matt. 22:11-14]. You notice there that we must be dressed appropriately. That means we must not only have been invited [and we are], and must have on our robe of righteousness, but that it also must be spotless. We all spot our robes, but a lifestyle of timely washing by repentance keeps us in clean, white robes.

1. It’s not sufficient that we believe accurately [meaning only intellectually] in Jesus, meaning believing that He is the Son of God, the Holy One of Israel, the Messiah. In Mark 1:21-28 you notice that the unclean spirit believed in Jesus accurately. Other spiritual personalities also believed accurately in Him, but did not believe into Him, which is saving faith. Also see Acts 19:13-17 and James 2:19-20. Religion can teach us the truth about Jesus, but it takes an act of God to grab us by the nape of our neck and immerse us into Jesus. We must be born again.
2. In Jeremiah 35:all the Lord expressed His appreciation of common human faithfulness. It was not a moral or spiritual matter. It had nothing to do with keeping the Law given to Israel by God through Moses. It was simply a segment of God’s people doing for generations [about 300 years at that time] that which a forefather had commanded them. What were his commands? Simply, 1) do not drink wine, 2) do not live in houses, but in tents, and 3) do not be farmers or vinedressers. Wonder of wonders, they did it, and they did it despite the fact that the Lord had Jeremiah test their resolve by offering them wine.

The keeping of their forefather’s commands enabled the Lord to use them as examples to greater Israel in regards to their not keeping His commands. On the spot, the Lord blessed them with an eternal blessing. That is a simple story with a profound and endless ending, which is probably more common in life than we are aware. Quality character, even though not religious in its obvious nature, is appreciated by the Lord and receives long-lasting rewards – Jer. 35:18-19.

1. Don’t leave the battle until the Lord is completely finished with you in it. Jesus drank the cup until it was empty [Matt. 26:39; John 19:30] and told His disciples that we are to do the same – Matt. 20:22-23. A great example of not leaving the battle until it is over is found in 2 Samuel 23:11-12 where the battle took place in a bean patch. One man stood his ground and defeated a large group of the enemy. It was only a patch of beans, but he was a man of principle and faith. I suspect that it was not even his bean patch, but he took God’s responsibility for it.

 God’s peace be with you.