THOUGHTS OF DECEMBER, 2011

1. A righteous wife is unsettled when she is in control of/over her husband. She will labor to find ways to strengthen her husband’s leadership/headship in regards to herself, and is blessed as he settles into that natural position in their marriage.

An unrighteous wife is content and pleased when she is in control of/over her husband. She will labor to work her way to the top, and is pleased the more her position is noticed, confirmed and exercised.

2. Question: How do you get beyond your self-imposed limitations?

3. “Not to be afflicted is a sign of weakness; for, therefore God imposeth no more on me, because he sees I can bear no more.” -- Joseph Hall. That’s moderately old English, so needs some “Selah.”

4. “As the wicked are hurt by the best things, so the godly are bettered by the worst.” -- William Jenkyn

5. “He that rides to be crowned, will not think much of a rainy day.” -- John Trapp. That’s deeper than it appears at first sight.

6. The Arab Spring that has turned into an Islamic Fall has no apparent leader. That is something the scattered little leaders will not tolerate because each is vulnerable in his diminutive condition. Their answer? A group or regional or one-world leader, who may be ready to step onto the scene.

7. There is an informal movement going on in America. It is difficult to know how many are part of it, but in the elections of November, 2012 we should get an effective count of them. There is evidence that it is a generally righteous movement, made up of political, intellectual, cultural, technological, and religious parts. At this point, the parts want nothing more than liberty.

Who are they? They are millions of entrepreneurs; they are multitudes who do not want to be felt-up at airports; they are protestors of the Federal Reserve, they are those who want to decentralize government and rid ourselves of creeping fascism [government control of private industry and business]; they are those who demand lower taxes and free trade; they are those who want the right to associate with anyone they want and to buy and sell on terms of their own choosing, they are those who insist they can better educate their children on their own, and there are those who know they can cause economic growth.

If there can be said to be one rallying point, it is to live under small government and the individual freedoms of our Constitution, as designed by our founding fathers. At its roots, this movement is religious, as were those founding fathers. Spiritual freedom breeds responsible political and social freedom. At this point, for America to rally in that way, it would have the force and results of a revolution.

We shall see what God will give us.

8. Bonds are developed by the dynamic flow of love [any and all types of love] between two or more persons. I will include animals in that statement. I think the largest part of the bond is accomplished by what we can do for the other, not what the other can do for us. Compare mothers [and fathers] with their babies, and even with an adopted baby. Everything that a mother does for her baby stirs her love for her baby, long before the baby is capable of having love or showing appreciation for its mother. That continues into the offspring’s adulthood, which then becomes more of a word to fathers than to mothers.

God’s love for us is the same. He looked at each of us thousands or millions of years ago and loved us – not because of what we would eventually do for Him, but because of the plans He had for us. He planned to shower us with His immeasurable, costly love.

If we want to really experience His love, all we need to do is relax, and let Him show it to us. Yes, we can experience His love while we are actively serving Him, but His love is given even when we are not actively serving or even obeying Him.

I can say now, at the first of the month, that it will be hard for me to top that Thought – especially since we will celebrate His earthly birth this month. He bonded with us long before we could begin to return the process toward Him – 1 John 4:19.

9. Here are some items to help us do an occasional self-evaluation: 1) Forgive! Unforgiveness is destructive of our body and soul, of relationships, and it alienates us from God. 2) All sin is against God. Yes, it is also against individuals and the body of Christ, but don’t forget the Lord. 3) That’s enough for now.

10. While walking with the Lord we will suffer. It is remarkable; suffering while walking with Him brings joy!! How can that be? It’s because the joy is not the result of the suffering, but because the suffering drives us closer to Him and He shares in it with us. That reward is worth the necessary suffering.

11. A study out of Rice University in Houston, Texas shows that almost 1 in 5 atheist professors go to church. Their reasons; 1) to expose their children to religion so that they can make their own fair-minded, informed decision on faith or atheism, 2) because they enjoy the socializing of church contacts, 3) scientists have a natural liking to explore potential options, and 4) that some atheists are married to believers so go with them to church. One wag suggested that some atheists do not believe that they do not believe.

12. Children who are taught that their ideas are on par with adults will grow up to be child-minded adults. That is my own Thought, not to be attributed to a reliable source.

13. “Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind” -- Albert Einstein. That’s close to the truth, because true religion and true science always agree. The Lord created both. If they don’t agree, it’s because one or both are off the mark.

14. As A. H. points out, Christians and Jews are family. We both are children of Abraham – Jews by natural birth and Christians by adoption. We should be thankful and nice to our natural born siblings.

15. You cannot stop an “act of God” [storm, hurricane, earth quake, etc.] but you can prepare for one. Do.

16. You will get this edition of THOUGHTS after Christmas and New Year celebrations have ceased for most of us, but today being December 5th I will remind all that Micah the prophet said God’s Son would be born in Bethlehem, and He was; that Isaiah the prophet said God’s Son would be born of a virgin, and He was; that Matthew said wise men from the East came to inquire where the Jewish king had been born; that Luke said angels came to some lowly shepherds with a message of spectacular news – that on that very day had been born in the city of King David the Savior, and He is Christ the Lord; and that Paul the apostle said in the fullness of time God sent His Son into the world.

We were each born on God’s schedule for us and for His plan for the universe. Ours is a good time to be alive. When we were reborn, the angels rejoiced. The Lord has unimaginable things in store for us, some of which depends on our faithful obedience at this time. He is running things. There are no surprises to Him. Trust and obey Him.

17. A word of encouragement: The Bible is very specific about what we are to expect of the church system in the last days – not a great renewal but a falling away from the truth – Matt. 24. [The great revival will come during the tribulation.] Remember that those passages in Matthew describe God’s Spirit born people whether within or without the church system. That’s not Israel, who are God’s natural born children.

In the last days the church will more intensely fall away from the truth than it has in the past. Wow, that’s far away! The neglected, unguarded heart will be overrun with worldly thoughts and desires, and will succumb to them. The neglected life of Jesus within believers will become as chaotic and immoral as the lives of rank unbelievers. Intercessory and other praying will diminish because of the cooling of love for the Lord, His ways and His commandments. Unsuspected corruption will be commonplace because of an ignorance of God’s word, which will develop through neglect and lack of jealous protection. Humanism will have crept in under the disguise of love and tolerance. Silent darkness will overtake the church that trusts in its own strength and forgets its Lord Creator and Builder.

18. Jesus’ message and calling slew the flesh; many messages today entertain the flesh. Jesus’ message condemned the flesh; many messages now amuse the flesh. Jesus’ message causes us to lose confidence in the flesh; many messages today encourage the flesh. It has been said that when the Lord gets sick of being misrepresented, He will show Himself – meaning pour out His Spirit for renewal, or come for His people.

19. The Hubble Space Telescope is something! It’s the size of a bus, moves at ridiculous speeds orbiting the earth [5 miles per second], and captures images with mind-blowing clarity. The Lord’s handiwork, which is many light years away, appears up-close and personal, while spectacular. The telescope has taken close to 1 million photographs since its launch and will continue taking pictures for another year or more until its replacement is on the way – an even better telescope possibly capable of looking back in time [??] to the very day the universe came into existence! In that case, it must also have ears, not only eyes, because the Lord spoke the worlds into existence.

20. “I can see how it might be possible for a man to look down upon the Earth and be an atheist, but I cannot conceive how he could look up into the heavens and say there is no God” – Abraham Lincoln.

21. Yes, the Lord has named every one of the stars – Ps. 147:4. I don’t know if that means each has an individual, non-duplicated name, because scientists are now telling us that there may be more stars than grains of sand on Earth’s seashores. No surprise there!

And, as far as the infinite number of names needed; no problem to our infinite God. And, He will not need to do as did our brother and world heavyweight boxing champion, George Foreman. George named all of his 8 [more or less] sons “George.”

22. Unity is corporate humility.

23. I am not a church historian, but have read a lot about church history, starting with Genesis1. Previous outpourings of the Holy Spirit, like occurred at Pentecost, were spontaneous. Some were prayed for for years. The anticipated outpouring in Corpus Christi, Texas is being preceded by God’s instructions and preparations. He is offering the church [all types of us] the advance opportunity to repent of our many and entrenched sins against Him and humanity, with instructions to live and preach ALL of the gospel, thus to become servant brothers to those of the outpouring.

Those of the outpouring will be principally in the workplace. In the workplace we can see that He has raised and is raising up dedicated Christians, placing them at the top of all segments of society – mayor, county judge, city manager, police chief, sheriff, fire chief, superintendent of public schools, publisher and CEO of the newspaper, and CEOs of hospitals, colleges, engineering companies, local state positions, our U. S. congressman, etc. Our workplace leadership is the Lord’s “re-bar,” being positioned in preparation for the general outpouring [cement] which is scheduled on His own time.

The noticeable “rising tide of God consciousness” among the general population in Corpus Christi is thought by some to be the Lord’s outpouring [cement] from the bottom of society upward. It may be. We shall see.

24. Hearing God speak ordinarily requires knowledge that He speaks, then an abiding openness to His voice, plus a desire to hear and obey Him. Aside from that, He can do it millions of other ways.

25. The Lord has charged us to: 1) integrate the leadership, 2) activate the intercessors [activists], and 3) to appeal for unity. That’s our assigned responsibility, aside from the generic ones assigned to every Christian.

26. We can see something else the Lord is doing here: 1) He is releasing us from our limits – those which are self-imposed, imposed by Satan, traditional ones, etc. 2) We are being repositioned – in relationship to Jews, other religions, the gutter-bums, other Christians, civil government, etc. and 3) He has given us a fresh, new anointing which came without notice – at least without being noticed initially. My best hindsight suggests that it came with or because we noticed greater opportunity to bear our crosses, and did, and are.

27. The manger scene, re-visited: The Roman census required Jews to register at the place of their tribal origin. Thus, Joseph, being of the tribe of David, registered at Bethlehem instead of at his then-current residence at Nazareth. Mary was pregnant. She delivered her child, Jesus, in a stable, wrapping him in cloth that was possibly the same material used by shepherds in the process of delivering lambs. This took place in the fall of the year, probably at Rosh Hashanah, called by the Jews, “The Birthday of the World.” From calculations based on the course of Zacharias’ priesthood given in Luke 1:5, the birth of his son, John the Baptist, can be calculated to a date in mid-March. Thus, Jesus was born 6 months later; probably on Rosh Hashanah. You can fill in the story by reading Luke 2:8-16.

On the eight day following His birth, Jesus was circumcised. On the 40th day the traveled to Jerusalem, where Mary offered the sin price of 2 turtledoves, as required by Jewish Law. There, Simeon and Anna prophesied over Jesus. After that, Mary and Joseph and Jesus continued northward to their own city, Nazareth – Luke 2:39-40. That is the story of Jesus’ birth and the few weeks following. There were no wise men in that part of the story, and no star to have guided them. What happened?

The Magi lived in the East, probably in Mesopotamia. They were a hereditary, untouchable priesthood whose Bible name of “Magi” is derived from a Persian proper noun which was the name of their caste. The word Magi in English rightly implies a mystical significance, but has nothing to do with magic or magicians. Those words came later and are a corruption of their true origin. Their appointment with this part of Christian destiny began when they detected something extraordinary in the heavens, probably around the time of Jesus’ birth. They knew the asterisms of the stars, and that the constellations foretold a coming Redeemer. When they saw His star they came to worship Him and pay tribute to a king.

The Magi were invested with great political power throughout a succession of powers – Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, Parthian, and then Roman. The modern name of their territory is present-day Iran.

The Magi were pan-theological. Baal and Astarte were the main gods of that succession of empires, each of which worshiped a great many more. Even with that environment, the Magi absolutely forbade the worship of an image. This and other beliefs and practices may show the influence of Moses, Jewish Law and the Jewish prophets with whom they had intimate contact before, during and after the 70 years of Jewish captivity in Babylon. Daniel was an influential person among them.

Their earliest beginnings were in the 7th century B. C. They centered their worship about an altar upon which was an “eternal flame.” God was a fiery reality, and the heavenly host of stars were extensions of Him. They at least appeared to possess great spiritual knowledge and power, and “hidden knowledge.” Their traditional costumes were white conical hats with side flaps that covered the sides of their heads and tied beneath their chins. Their robes were also of pure white.

By the mid-6th century B. C., during the reign of Cyrus the Great, they began to honor a single, self-created god of light. They were monotheistic, hereditary priests, regarded as mediators between God and man. They offered blood sacrifices to Him on their altars.

As mentioned, their encounter with the Jews in captivity brought them close to ancient Jewish worship and prophecy. Daniel lived among them as a respected spiritual authority. When Daniel died, probably in his mid or late eighties, he was buried in the territory of ancient Persia. Then the captivity ended and [a small portion of] the Jews returned to the Promised Land. Through Daniel the Magi knew of the coming Messiah, including Daniel’s ninth chapter which features both Christ and antichrist.

By the fourth century B. C., the Magi and their worship were heavily influenced by Judaism. The Magis’ monotheism fit well with the teachings of Israel’s prophets, preparing them for their later appearance in Israel to herald the coming of the King. By the beginning of the third century B. C., their religion was the state religion of Persia. Their powerful status persisted into the time of Jesus’ birth.

The highest council of the Magi was the kingmaker of the ancient world. When they met to declare God’s will to the state authorities, their decision was binding. Thus, their combined wealth, power and spiritual nature were untouchable. When they entered Jerusalem they were a force to be recognized and honored.

When they traveled, they were mounted on the finest horses [never on camels, which they despised], whose descendents became today’s Arabian horses. They traveled with an armed cavalry, attendants, cooks, soldiers, wagons and servants. Some estimate that over 100 Magi were delegates to the newborn king. This company of hundreds probably represented one of the most imposing and awe-inspiring spectacles in the ancient world. Jerusalem was electrified. See Matthew 2.

All of that occurred over a year after Jesus was born, most probably in the month of December [around the date of our modern Christmas] – based on the Bible narrative and computer re-created astronomical information that told the Magi the long-awaited king had been born. If you are interested, one of the astronomical spectacles of the time was the conjunction of the “King Planet” [Jupiter], the “King Star” [Regulus], and the planets Venus and Saturn.

It was no wonder that “all Jerusalem” was distressed by the appearance of the Persian Magi. Everyone, including Herod, knew that the Magi had the power to make and break monarchies, and it was an official visit – to confer upon Jesus the title of King and High Priest of Israel and to give Him wealth appropriate for a king. But, the Magi only wanted the authorities to produce the king whom they knew to be present in their midst. No wonder Herod was troubled. He met with temple authorities who knew from Micah and Genesis that their Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. Herod tried to draw them into his plan to kill the 15 month old toddler [“young child,” from the Greek, “paidion,” meaning “toddler”], but they and the Lord were not to be duped. Note that the Magi were not afraid of Herod’s forces or the Roman army. Wow!

The Magi left Jerusalem and headed for Bethlehem, following the star that continued to tell them of the new king. At that time, Mary and Joseph and Jesus were in a house, not a stable or an inn. The Bible is silent as to why the family had journeyed back to Bethlehem over a year after Jesus’ birth. We can say that it was God’s appointment for them. Matthew went on to describe how God saved the young Messiah and possibly the Magi – Matt. 2:8-12.

Those Magi knew they were bowing before a king. They honored Him with gifts of tremendous value, then, in keeping with their spiritual nature, they believed that their fresh dream was from God, obeyed, and returned home another way – after sharing the dream and its meaning with Joseph and Mary.

I know that this more accurate re-arrangement of the nativity story changes some of your very traditional beliefs. Mine, too. How does that affect you? Me, too.

28. The Lord our Creator gave us a memory, with which we are to do two things: turn it on and turn it off. We should put it to good use in school and almost all other times.

I had a friend who drove his car by memory at least once too often. One day he forgot that a certain intersection had a stop sign, and ran almost through it. “Almost” because He was broadsided by a car that had the right-of-way. I heard the crash and got there in a minute. He and all were unhurt, and the car had minimal damage. He was telling others: “I didn’t remember that there was a stop sign at this intersection.” Memory has limited use.

I had another friend. He was noted for having a “pained personality.” When someone offended him, he had some difficulty forgiving, and great difficulty forgetting the offense. There are many times when we should simply forget things. Happily married folks can tell you that little non-secret. They can give lots of testimony about how, in disagreements/arguments they learned to forget, instead of becoming historical [yes, that’s historical, not hysterical]. Recalling past offences and bringing them up at seemingly opportune times is self-destructive.

Remember that we have a memory, and that it should be deliberately used and deliberately not used. We can develop an unlisted fruit of the spirit, called forgetfulness. That goes with another unlisted fruit of the spirit called flexibility.

Also to be remembered is that the longer our remembered list of grievances grows, the more we develop and display a “pained personality.” I suppose I should say that some of us deliberately develop that “pained personality” and enhance it for display during choice situations.

Forgetters can be some of the most pleasant and uplifting people. As I look over my brief mailing list of you who receive THOUGHTS, I am blessed in that way. You know how to forget.

29. The root word of the Hebrew word for love [ohav] means “I will give.” That’s good to think about.

30. A marriage is not to be entered for the purpose of receiving continual happiness from or because of our spouse – even our well-chosen one. If that is our purpose [and it is, at least to a measurable degree], we are soon disillusioned – right?

On the other hand, most of us can also recall another attraction to our mate-to-be. That other attraction began to come to the front as we developed “ohav.” As ohav grew, we began to understand that marriage presented us with the opportunity to meet the challenges of life with the one we “ohav,” and happiness happened. Even at that point, it is good to remember that we are not meant to always be happy.

There is something really great and unifying about facing challenges with another/others, as military warriors also can affirm.

31. Have you noticed, as I have, that disagreements happen? If they happen in marriage, a quick vote doesn’t help because they always seem to end in ties. If prayer [together and apart], review of all known facts, carefully measured acts of sacrifice, and other forms of righteousness and spiritual maturity or immaturity do not settle the issue, what do you resort to? Time and patience? Deference? Huffing and puffing until the other has been punished sufficiently? Agreeing to disagree? Quoting scriptural support? Something distasteful comes up into our mouth from the stomach of our soul when we win-out in a disagreement by being unrighteous.

32. It has been said: 1) “I have been happily married for 50 years.” – by a movie actor who had had 6 different wives. 2) “One must be married for at least 100 years to accumulate 50 good ones.” – George Burns. 3) “The most difficult years of marriage are those following the wedding.” – Mae West.

There is no substitute for ohav in a marriage, or any other committed relationship.

33. For years I have recognized that I am not one for praying long or repetitiously about a topic, or for informing the Lord in prayer about matters. For effectiveness in prayer I have been more impressed with the need for an abiding life [John 15:7], a broad and consistent honesty with the Lord [and man], and a personal divestment from that which the Lord may say and do about the subject matter of my prayers. I realize that that course reduces the length and spontaneity of my prayers. At times I have pondered and at times been concerned about my lack of praying according to more common ways.

34. Sometimes I am tempted to discount another’s word/prophecy if it is harsh or pushy. If I don’t get into rejecting that word too quickly, I begin a little process of evaluation. It usually goes like this: 1) Is he really unrighteous? 2) Is he a righteous person with a hard message? 3) Is my bias tainting him and/or his message? Of course, it may be a mix of the 3.

I am tempered by the biblical record of the prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, et. al. Jesus was the only perfect One with a perfect presentation of a perfect message. All others were imperfect to some extent, as were the presentations of their messages. In any case, the hearers were held responsible for listening and heeding.

35. We live and act upon faith or unbelief all of the time. If we believe that we can pay for that car, we buy it. If we believe we will enjoy food at that restaurant, we eat there. If we believe the lights will go on when we turn the switch, we turn the switch. And, of course, we do the opposite if we do not believe. The point is, we are creatures of faith, and if our faith is real we act upon it. True faith produces action. That faith is alive, not dead. It may stretch us at times, but we will act upon that which we believe.

Likewise, when we do not believe, we lose. Parents who do not believe in their children, create “loss.” Children who do not believe in their parents, create “loss.” When we do not believe in our brother, or in the Lord, we create “loss.” Unbelief causes loss; faith causes gain. Without faith we cannot please the Lord – or our brother, or our nation.

36. This Thought is only part of its larger picture. It goes like this: Our Catholic brothers hold high the cross of Jesus with Him still on it. Such is meaningful to them, especially to those in distress [locally or third world]. They can identify with the suffering, “hopeless,” “defeated” Jesus. Therefore they gain succor for their suffering, especially if it is severe, unavoidable, and prolonged.

On the other hand, our Protestant brothers hold high the cross of Jesus without Him on it. Their venerated crosses are empty because they emphasize His resurrection. They look forward to, and believe they will receive, deliverance from their misery.

37. A wise and well-respected friend says there are 3 types of people, each of which we are to relate to differently. To the wise we are to listen, walk with, honor and refer others. With the foolish we are not to waste much time, and certainly not listen to. With the evil we are to avoid associating, and to watch them closely.

38. It has always been good to use critical/exacting/judicious/analytical/ thinking, but I’ll venture to say that it is more important “these days.” We are in a world of deception. Increasingly, good is called bad and bad is called good. That’s not a new thing, but reverse/upside down/deceptive thinking is increasing, is it not? Saints, don’t be reluctant to be on the outside of your peer groups. Don’t accept seemingly-logical and expedient fallacies. [False] logic is commonly used to destroy faithfulness and morality. Deceptions permeate our world. Watch especially within the church.

39. It’s a nice little thought: Were the shepherds who were out in the fields of Bethlehem watching over their flocks at night while Jesus was being born [Luke 2:8] in the same fields as those of Jesus’ ancestors, Boaz and Ruth [Ruth 2]? It’s a small world, Israel is a small nation, and Bethlehem with its environs was a little community.

40. The Lord is not only jealous; He is also zealous. Isaiah [9:7] knew that. Whatever He says He will do, He is zealous to do it – to fulfill His word. “The zeal of the Lord will accomplish this” also applies to His word about Corpus Christi. In addition, we hear from one area after another that He is doing the same thing in other cities, with slight variations. The central action is that He is raising up workplace leaders who are anointed with the Holy Spirit; who are taking responsibility for the kingdom in their cities. Every place is special and customized. Occasionally I wonder why Corpus Christi is so special, or if we are special at all – meaning if we are special beyond anyone else.

41. America and its revolution were unique in world history. We were founded on Christian-based ideals, on the rights and obligations of our citizens. That prevented the revolution from going the bloody way of the French revolution, the atheistic way of the Russian revolution, and the disjointed way of the Iranian revolution. Instead, our revolution produced a democracy. Our 3 branches of government are patterned after biblical principles; those well spoken by Isaiah [33:22]: Judge [courts/judiciary], lawgiver [congress/legislature], and king [president/executive]. Those fathers knew their Bible and knew what they were doing when they set up our governmental system.

In the 1960s our picture of our culture and nation began to change. Whereas we had been proud of our individual liberty, and had helped others to succeed; we began to believe that truth was relative, individual liberty was selfish, and that helping others to succeed was the responsibility of the government.

British historian Alexander Tyler wrote that throughout history, nations have gone through a cycle: “..from bondage to spiritual faith; from spiritual faith to great courage; from courage to liberty; from liberty to abundance; from abundance to complacency; from complacency to apathy; from apathy to dependency; from dependence back again into bondage.” Without a spiritual revival, we will move from our current condition of apathy into dependency – already, 50% of households in America are receiving some sort of government assistance. Our last step downward is into bondage. Choose your master.

42. It has been said that there are two important things to keep in mind if we are going to have, at least in the long run, a productive and healthy life. One is that we must recognize which external events can affect our lives, and plan accordingly. Yes, there are black swans, but they are rare compared to the common external events for which we can prepare, like bad tires, leaky roofs, car wrecks, choices of friends and mate, sufficient education and training, balancing savings with generosity, vocation, debt limits [or no debt], purchasing insurance, etc.

The other is that we need to develop the clearheadedness required to interpret life’s events without emotion. Seeing things as they really are, in all of their dimensions [natural and spiritual, personal and social, real or imagined, etc.], prevents our unintentional violation of basic laws, whether God’s [sin] or nature’s [gravity] or society’s [speeding]. Mal-alignment with the basics causes problems; alignment allows for peace and progress. We have enough problems in this world resulting from our righteousness, without increasing them through dumbness or stubbornness, don’t we!

I think that the Lord had been talking to Abraham for years about the necessity of sending away Hagar and Ishmael. Abraham loved Ishmael and had wonderful plans for him. However, Abraham did not see how incongruous life would be if Ishmael and the coming [and then come] son of promise remained together in the family. He was given a hint of the incongruity as he had to watch the growing problem between Sarah and Hagar. But, I am supposing, Abraham did not recognize that Ishmael was an external problem in relation to himself and Sarah’s son. He was blocked from seeing it because of an understandable emotional trap – fatherly love for a son in whom he already had completely invested his life and who had so completely responded as a good son should. Add to that that Abraham considered Ishmael to be God’s gift, to be cherished and developed into the family’s leader.

So, what would your do about Abraham’s problem [of not listening to the Lord] if you were the Lord, the All-mighty, the Creator, the One who was responsible for Abraham’s life beyond Abraham’s responsibility for his own life? I am tempted to put my answer at the end of this edition, or in the next edition, but it’s too good to delay. God’s solution to His [and, to a much lesser extent, Abraham’s] problem was ….. Gen. 21:12. Of all things!! God told Abraham, that great man of God, that patriarch or patriarchs, that man of faith, to do whatever his wife said to do!!! Ah, yes; the Lord is good!

43. I hope this is as comforting to you as it is to me: “The Lord is easy to please but not easy to satisfy.”

44. A confirmed bachelor has some wisdom for us married folks. He was told, by a long-married brother, that marriage is a crash course for growing up spiritually. He responded that when one marries, he/she trades one set of problems for another of equal intensity but different sort. Thus, one course is no more or less intensive than the other. Agree?

45. Scientists working for the U. S. government have created new mutant strains of the deadly bird flu virus that spread easier than the original virus. The details are not public. There are concerns that the details may be hijacked, and by the wrong people. The scientists said it was easier to create the new strains than they thought it would be, and that the new strains have proven to spread easily, at least among some mammals.

This is a dangerous world. The Lord is aware of that. He gave us our bodies for temporary use.

46. Atheists, who have only a material, no-god framework, cannot defend whatever moral absolutes they try to impose on others. When they try to establish and defend their own style of moral absolutes, they are caught in relativism and become even more illogical. Absolutes require God [or, to some, a god or gods]. If there is no God, the only possible absolutes are those developable and enforceable by those who wield the biggest sword.

It seems good to some that moral absolutes are wilting in modern society, but their sense of freedom [license] experienced by loss of absolutes eventually degenerates into anarchy, presenting the need for a dictator. Dictatorships eventually lead to revolutions, started by heroes who are often persons of faith, which presents the opportunity for social/civil reform at the hands of God/god/gods-believers who have moral absolutes.

The Holy Spirit, who is always at work in this world, is a God of order. He is always “cooking” something, everywhere, whether on a personal or corporate level; thus, the waxing and waning on a cultural level, sometimes referred to as the swinging pendulum. It seems that humanity, whether in the kingdom of this world or in the kingdom of God, is incapable of sustaining a good or a bad thing.

The Holy Spirit keeps working simply and majestically. He never loses.

“Life is real; life is earnest. The grave is not the goal. ‘Dust thou art, and to dust returnest’ was not spoken of the soul.” – Anon, via G.N.

47. When the Greek Empire defeated the Medo-Persian Empire and dominated that area of the world, the Greeks left Israel undisturbed in the Land. The Greek influence on Jewish culture and thought was tremendous, but there was no attempt to drive the Jews from their homeland.

Yet, the Jews refer to the time of Greek authority and influence as the time of their “Greek Exile.” The exile was an exile of thought, meaning that Jewish thought was exiled from among them. Unfortunately, although it was neither a complete nor a long exile of thought, it was very effective – so effective that the Jews consider it a time of darkness such as was the darkness of Genesis 1:1-5. It was a time of the loss of the essence of spirituality.

The Greek [Hellenist] worldview glorified human beings as the pinnacle of creation, in both body and mind. They believed that the world was run by natural laws, and that man’s mind [intellect and observation] can entirely grasp and eventually manipulate those laws. They thought [as do today’s Hellenists] that there exists no reality beyond the physical world.

So, understandably, Athens and Jerusalem locked horns. The Jews knew that the soul was reality; that the intellect was a powerful and reliable tool of the soul and the body was its servant. I know that you have noticed that the Greek-Jewish struggle continues into today, even in believers’ souls. The Holy Spirit is given to lead us out of the quandary, to live even beyond the soul; to live in the Spirit. Praise and thank You, Lord Jesus!

48. People who have endured suffering and proven God to be faithful are strong, gentle, mellow and patient. Some of the people drawn to them are attracted because they saw them going through the fire and saw the victory process. Others, not knowing of the fires, are drawn because of the godly aroma of Christ’s true likeness.

49. Unity is a powerful force, whether for believers or unbelievers. For believers, we are granted an additional increase of that force, because/if the cost we pay for establishing and maintaining our unity with one another or with a real or supposed enemy is voluntary, costly and done through obedience to and faith in the Lord.

Disunity is also a powerful force, whether for believers or unbelievers. For believers, Satan stands ready and able to grant us anything we require in order to splinter marriages, congregations, etc. He hates our Lord/Friend/Brother and knows the danger to himself of John 17:23.

50. Have you lost a cherished goal or possession or person lately? It’s a painful experience, isn’t it!

Adam chose to disobey God rather than to lose his wife [had not the Lord God made him responsible for her? – Gen. 1, 2].

Paul lost Demas, a coworker, because Paul did not adequately appreciate his contribution to the ministry [or was Demas world-minded? -- Col. 4:14; Philemon 1:24; 2 Tim. 4:10].

Lot lost his wife because of her concern for those of whom God’s calling had separated them [more than she was concerned for her family and the Lord. – Gen. 19; Luke 17:32].

Joshua lost Achan and his entire family because Joshua didn’t understand that to the victor belongs the spoil [or was it greed? – Josh. 7].

Israel lost King Saul because they did not adequately support him in battle [could his envy of David, God’s anointed, have contributed? – 1 Sam. 19].

Solomon lost the kingdom for his descendents despite his superior wisdom [except in regards to family life and women – 1 Kings 11].

Jesus lost Judas because He did not spend enough quality time with His disciple [or did Judas’ prime intent, to induce Jesus to set up His kingdom now, drive him to betrayal and destruction? -- John 13:21-30].

The church lost Simon, one of its members and more outstanding testimonies, because the church leaders had not taught him adequately [maybe Simon’s carnal spirituality had something to do with his problems – Acts 8].

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” – Jim Elliot, 10-28-49

51. As I understand it [Warning; that means take this for what it’s worth.], quantum physics starts with an accepted truth, then fills in the gaps with logic. It has been said in this way: “I think it is safe to say that no one understands quantum mechanics ... in fact it is often stated that of all the theories proposed in this century [the 1900s – ed.] the silliest is quantum theory. Some say that the only thing that quantum theory has going for it, in fact, is that it is unquestionably correct.”

Much of Christian faith is that way. We start with clear statements in Scripture, relate them to other clear statements in Scripture, and fill in the gaps with logic – Holy Spirit-informed, biblically reasonable logic. I would say [again, take this for what it’s worth] that such is God’s plan for us. We have to live by filling in the gaps, whether it be as world kingdom citizens or spiritual kingdom citizens. We are not given the gap information, so must be guided by informed reason – whether it be driving our cars per established laws or living our lives as God’s children. An example of this is that which we know and that which we deduce about end times – the rapture of the church, the Lord’s second coming with all of His saints, the Millennium, etc.

That puts us into a great and broad place, which in some cases results in license and in other cases results in restraint. Therefore, our personal and denominational theologies vary. I want to say that I like that situation and its results. I like the differences that have resulted from God-fearing believers filling in the gaps. I’m not sure that it would be an improvement if we all came to the same conclusions on all the commonly accepted truths and on all the gap fillers.

For one thing, that level of common agreement would do away with probably the major evangelistic tool the Lord of the church gave us from the beginning, 2,000 years ago. Even though a high level of common agreement on theology would seem to be of prime importance, there is a higher level of importance to our having major disagreements and differences and yet be seen as loving and united.

The world is not very impressed when it sees the functional unity of identical skins, social groups, ethnic and religious groups, but it is impressed when it sees love and functional unity among widely differing groups. That’s our message from John 17:22-24. That’s why the Lord is not greatly disturbed over our differences, especially when we are actively, deliberately loving one another.

Just a nod to acknowledge that many of our disagreements are caused by our unrighteousnesses.

THE FOLLOWING Thoughts ARE YEAR END ENCOURAGEMENTS:

52. A 13 year old has received a provisional patent for having discovered that small solar panels arranged in the same pattern as tree branches produced 29% more energy than flat panel arrangements. The array is called the Firbonacci sequence. Another revelation of the Master Architect – Rom. 1:19-20!!

53. Twelve year old Dale Ostrander drowned off the Oregon coast when he was pulled away and under by a rip tide. He was underwater for 25 minutes before he was found and brought to shore. Technically, he was dead. Faith with works gave him life – CPR was administered as family and church members gathered around and prayed – James 2:14. He lives and talks. More is not known at this time.

54. The U. S. House of Representatives passed a resolution reaffirming “In God We Trust” as the official motto of the United States of America. The vote was 396 to 9.

55. It has been confirmed that particles of matter called “neutrinos” travel faster than the speed of light. Perhaps that is what our new bodies will be made of, so we can travel as fast as thought, as Jesus was able to do on Earth during those 40 days after His resurrection. At one point He had said, “Don’t touch me because I have not yet ascended to My Father” – John 20: 17. Soon thereafter He invited Thomas to touch Him – John 20:27. Apparently He had made a quick round trip from Earth to the third heaven, and back. When we see Him we will be like Him – Phil. 3:21.

56. Life is good. On balance, there are more good things happening than bad. Having an accurate mental posture in and view of life moves the scale toward the good and farther from the bad. There are problems and there is evil. All things are turned to good as we continue in our love for and trust of the Lord, and continue following Him. If you have been presented with more grief than blessings this year, call on the Lord and draw near to other faithful saints. Follow Him for the trip, not for the blessings. The walk is ours; the results are His. His name is Jesus and He is the Lord.

Greetings, 2012.