THOUGHTS OF DECEMBER, 2014

1. When Jesus said, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” – Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58, He was saying and doing several things. First, He was discouraging a big commitment in a small believer, not wanting that as-yet-unprepared but eager person to abandon his present life-situation, then end-up failing in his commitment to discipleship. At another time, when He had a large crowd following Him, He told them that if they did not hate their families and their own lives they would not make the cut for discipleship. First they were to count the “no turning back” cost. At that time in their lives it was more important for them to not start than to start and fail – Luke 14:28-33.

Secondly, He was pointing out that in His present humanity as Son of Man He had little going for Himself and thus for themselves temporally. That was enough to discourage yet another percent of His growing crowd of new believers. He had nothing and was promising them nothing temporally.

Thirdly, and this was the most grand part of the offer to anyone who had ears to hear, He offered them all of Himself in return for all of themselves. He would lead them to His and their crosses in return for fellowship with Him. It was to be a total sharing; a depth of fellowship that more than paid for the price of their everything. He guaranteed them that they would never regret their decision, but only if and when they were ready and did pay the price of discipleship. One of those in the crowd, who had already made his commitment to discipleship in Jesus, shared the depth of that understanding about 60 years later – 1 John 1:1-4.

Again we see the Christianization of non-religious workplace thought, as William Blake [1757-1827], British painter, poet and possible Christian wrote, “The bird a nest, the spider a web, man friendship.”

2. When John wrote [as John must have also said many times to those saints with him], “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments” – 1 John 2:3 and onward into verses 4 and 5, was He saying that if we know Him we will apply ourselves to keeping His commandments? [I think not, although there is truth in that thought.] Is our love for God expressed through our obediences to Him? [Yes, but that still is lacking in regards to this Thought.] Is our religion the faithful focus of obeying Him? [No, but the faithful do desire to obey Him.] Is God’s love in us shown best by our actions toward Him? [No, but it is related.] Is obedience the highest sign of being a true believer? [No but, again, it is related.] Are we perfected in Him by keeping His commandments? [No!]

All of those partial truths of understanding what John wrote are meant to help us see instead that we are the objects of God’s attention and affection. His revelation to us, His work on us, His attention to us, and His power in us is the reason we love Him. Then, our love for Him is the reason for our obedience. We love Him because He first loved us, which empowers us and focuses us on Him.

3. Why THOUGHTS? You have your Bibles and you read them regularly with open and malleable minds, so why read THOUGHTS and other non-Bible books and papers? My reason is so that if I do not get all that I should from my understanding and application of the Bible I can get those gaps filled in by that which the Lord has given to other saints, be they current or ancient.

As I have often said in THOUGHTS, nothing originates with me. There is nothing new under the sun. I benefit from a spiritually enlightened, biblically trained mind, which makes reading, listening and seeing meaningful. An occasional revelation helps. All of that makes sense of life and its components and brings an order to all things. Science knows that, or there would be little or no discoveries. One fact or idea is based on previously known facts and ideas – “precept upon precept,” etc. Some things I read stir me to share them with you, after some degree of digestion and possible re-arrangement of thought or conclusion. That which comes in from “X” goes out from me as THOUGHTS, Bible lessons, conversations, counsel, prayers, etc. You do the same all the time. Let’s keep good news and The Good News flowing. And don’t stop when the enemy gets agitated and troublesome.

4. Any Christian who settles for mediocrity doesn’t know …….. [there are many answers] …….:

… the joy of Christian abandonment to the Lord.

… the Bible as God’s living word.

… that we fanatics have a much more interesting life.

… that the more we pay now, the more we will receive now and later, and vs.

… anyone who has set an example of discipleship.

… that there is “more.”

… how they are damaging themselves, and others.

… that further down the trail are answers to prayers, light, blessings, understanding and strength.

… that he/she is mediocre, and a Laodicean.

… Jesus well enough.

… that there are rewards for us in the hereafter, for us to gain and “lay away” only now.

… \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

5. Today a wise and loving brother referred me to Isaiah 30:21, adding that it was a word to me from the Lord. It reads, “Your ears will hear a word behind you, “This is the way, walk in it,” whenever you turn to the right or to the left.” I have long been accustomed to the Lord’s rod [Bible and Church directing and correcting] and staff [Holy Spirit and Church supporting and comforting] – Ps. 23:4. It seems that such is continuing.

6. “The one thing all famous authors, world-class athletes, business tycoons, singers, actors, and celebrated achievers in any field have in common is that they all began their journeys when they were none of these things.” – Mike Dooley [1961-present], American author, owner of Adventures Club. Jesus started His earthly journey being who He was but having nothing else going for Him. He became a success because He was a routine, daily success.

7. To have order among humanity we must have laws. Not simply any laws but the right ones. Each must be able to stand alone morally and agree with the essential intent of all other laws. They must 1) not be retroactive, but must deal with the now and tomorrow. Retroactive laws, although we certainly would like to put some into place from time to time, punish or govern that which was legal yesterday. That squelches the good and the bad. 2) be clear and coordinated with all other laws, or society becomes schizophrenic if it tries to function according to law. 3) be possible to comply with, our Internal Revenue Code and other laws being examples of some that suppress life and work, and open everyone to selective prosecution. 4) promote stability by not changing too often, so the people will be able to form personal plans and develop a social order, being guided by the rules’ united intent and encouraged by their morality. 5) be equally applied to everyone so that an elite or powerful group will not have its way over the masses. It goes without saying that civil laws do not solve all of society’s problems, but they are laid down as re-bar so that the cement of love can be variably poured over it as the church provides a solid base of morality.

As you know, the steady movement of all civil governments is to continually gain more control over their inhabitants by various forms of force and to exempt itself from their own laws. I look at King Jesus who lived and died as a servant of the citizens of His kingdom, and how He has gained authority over us by His authoritative, sacrificial love.

8. “Our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable, unhappy or unfulfilled. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers.” – M. Scot Peck [1936-2005], American psychiatrist, non-denominational Christian. That is basic to the testimony of many of us, is it not?

9. “If you do something with your whole heart and it’s a mistake, you can live with that.” – Florence Welch [1986-present], British musician, singer and song writer. There are sincere people who hold tenaciously to ideas that are wrong, not meaning to be or do bad. I suppose that could be acceptable if no one was adversely affected, but truth is available. Many things are self-evident, like the basic existence and obvious presence of an all-mighty god – Rom. 1:18-32.

It is saddening when we do not put into an effort that which we could have, and it fails; and less saddening if we have given it our best effort.

10. Question: Is one’s religion personal and private?” By “personal” is usually meant, “I decide what I will believe. No one will tell me what to believe.” By “private” is usually meant, “Only between me and my God. I don’t talk about my religion.” I hope that your religion is personal, such as, “The Lord and I love one another and we love you,” and is not private because the Holy Spirit urges and empowers us to fulfill the commanded Great Commission as in Matthew 28:19-20.

Christians have a very personal religion because our God loved us first. We have a very public religion because we and He wants us to go public.

11. “Knowing your own darkness is the best method for dealing with the darknesses of other people.” – Carl Jung [1875-1961], Swiss psychiatrist, psychotherapist, psychoanalyst, dream analyst and philosopher. His writings on religions show him to have been a pantheist who saw that religion [take your choice of which religion] was both essential and an individual matter.

It still stirs me when I see the variable influence the Lord and His church have on societies’ and individuals’ thoughts and actions. Christendom is the term used to describe all and any who have been influenced by Christ and Christianity, whether or not they profess Jesus as their Savior. Others define Christendom as the total at any one time of all professing Christians.

12. On Monday, December 10th, a MK in Jerusalem, Israel had just addressed the Knesset. As a member of the opposition, he had “promised” that in the coming general elections of March 17th Israel would see the present government overturned. A few seconds later, as he stepped down from the platform, he tumbled onto the floor. Another MK was heard to faintly utter “oyoyoyo,” a compounded Yiddish term that quickly expresses a cosmic “OUCH!”

As he was being helped back to his feet, some noticed the body language and silent lips in the room. In the Book of Proverbs, their G-d instructs them to not rejoice when their enemy falls. Those bodies and silent lips seemed to be speaking loudly on the matter of justice just having been meted out.

13. The Lord sets our souls free through the Holy Spirit’s whispering of truth to us. That can be a spiritual-religious type of truth such as is found in Scripture, or it can be a spiritual-electronic type of truth or a spiritual-culinary type of truth or a spiritual-motherly type of truth, or etc. In our newly given freedom [if not hindered too much by those unregenerated areas of our souls] new insights are forthcoming. We change our thinking, first as a sovereign act of God, followed by intentionals of our own. Changed behavior follows in the same manner. A changed society results.

The changing of our intentions [from bad to good] is evidence of at least some perception of the truth, but good intentions do not necessarily mean godly intentions. Much of our good intentions are counterproductive to solving the problems at hand. Placing a drunk behind the wheel of a car because he needs a way to get home is an obvious example of a good intention gone awry. The Holy Spirit wants to convert us to good intentions and enlighten us so that our good intentions bring good results. That applies broadly, including to economics. Many religious leaders and academics and politicians, who certainly do influence our culture, tend to be ignorant of the soon and long-term results of good-sounding ideas. One of the more obvious and pressing examples is the welfare reformers who pay single mothers more for every child they have out of wedlock. You know the result: more illegitimate children who are raised in the welfare state social mentality “without needing” fathers.

Monthly welfare checks are not the only examples of this problem. Good intentions started food stamp programs, government healthcare, universal home ownership [a secret to the uninformed] and other programs that have led to the moral and economic collapses that we are seeing. By flooding society with aid we are making the only proven cure for poverty [jobs and work] unnecessary and nearly impossible.

Biblically based faithfulness should not only change one’s religious attitudes but also change one’s attitude toward marriage, child-bearing, work and financial responsibility. Our religious, academic and political leaders need to be more completely enlightened by the truth, they being frontline moral authorities. The church is the pillar and support of the truth in all of its applications – 1 Tim. 3:15. May the Lord grant us a hunger for His worldview that will lead to a cultural renaissance.

14. “A painting that is well-composed is half finished.” – Pierre Bonnard [1867-1947], French post-impressionist painter. Does anyone know what he was thinking? Yes; his paintings were the typical impressionist smeared and runny type as opposed to being of photographic clarity, but was there more to his quote than that?

15. How important are small things? I see in Scripture that littleness is no hindrance to God or to faithful humanity. Littleness is similar to being a remnant, both having great potential.

a. Littleness can be the size of a person, as with David and Goliath. In David’s mind, David was little, God was big, and Goliath was dead – 1 Sam. 17:45-47.

b. A little faith is adequate for anything if the one of little faith does not doubt. Peter and his little faith were adequate until he began to doubt – Matt. 14:31. Notice that it was not how little faith Peter had, but that he allowed himself to doubt. Jesus held him responsible for doubting but not for having little faith.

c. Or, littleness can be the size of a group. Israel was always, and still is, a little nation compared to its enemies but it was and is God’s pleasure to give them His coming earth-kingdom – Luke 12:32; 22:28-30.

d. Righteousness appears to be a great leveler in regards to littleness or bigness in numbers, attitude, and resources – Ps. 37:16-22; Rev. 3:8-9. Spiritual laws are perfect and always work.

e. Also, it is a basic principle that when we rightly and faithfully use the little we have, we are given more; if we hold too tightly to that which we have, we will lose even that – Luke 19:17-24.

All of that about small things and littleness is couching for my greater point, which is that things are not as bad for ourselves as they may look – Num. 13:27-33; Job 2:9-10. We are able to see and understand by the Spirit what is going on in and around us in the natural and in the spiritual – Eph. 5:15; Col. 4:5 [“redeeming the time” is “giving yourself to buy back others” during your short lifespan on earth, as did Jesus]. We have to deal with life’s naturalness spiritually. Deceiving and alarming spirits are at work. Their business is to make much of life seem overwhelming. Yes, and some may be temporally [not “temporarily”] overwhelming, but we are always offered the opportunity to live by whatever amount of faith we have – Rom. 12:3. That will be enough before God and the insightful, faithful ones who have eyes to see. Trying to work up more faith is acting carnally; deciding to trust the Lord with the faith we have is acting spiritually. As Jesus said to Peter, “It’s fine for you to have a little measure of faith, just don’t doubt” -- [paraphrased – ed.].

16. Here is a story outline that you might want to develop for yourself: In regards to Jesus building the church, the four gospels show us the church’s Foundation, of which there is no other. Immediately after the Foundation was laid, the last verses of Acts chapters 2 and 4 show us His promised handiwork at its best. Then the epistles were written for encouragement and instruction for becoming qualified and available material for the Builder as He continues building His house – Heb. 3:4-11. Rest is evidence that we are of that material. That enables Him to construct the one house of John 17:22, which is a temporal mirror of the heavenly unity between Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the unity that makes them One, a/the Trinity.

Please don’t dodge and weave on these questions; let them sit in your heart wherever the Holy Spirit might put them. The questions are, “Are you that united with others in your congregation. Is your congregation that united with other congregations? Do you have vision for that unity?” If not, what are you going to do about it today?

Jesus said He would build His church [Matt. 16:18], also called His body [Eph. 1:22-23]. Because He is the foundation, and there is no other [1 Cor. 3:11], what happens if the foundation is abandoned or if someone else builds an annex attached to His church but not on His foundation – Ps. 11:3. The “other” church builder had the choice of building on the foundational rock of Jesus or on sand [Matt. 7:24-27], in which case his folly will eventually become evident.

The church is experiencing the construction of annexes. In the main church building, practicing sinners such as homosexuals are loved and receive counsel that they are practicing sin, with reminders as necessary about the consequences for their practices in this earth-life and in the hereafter – 1 Tim. 1:8-11. In the annexes sinners are celebrated and promoted, even becoming leaders who teach others to practice the same – Rom. 1:18-32.

So what might the master builder do about those new annexes that misrepresent and slander Him? It seems that the most common way is for Him to send His word [His architectural plans for the church] to heal the construction problems – Ps. 107:20 (10-22). His word can come in many ways. It comes gracefully and clearly, perhaps repeatedly. On the other hand, read Ezekiel 9:1-8 and 1 Peter 4:17-18 regarding sinners and those who condone sin, if only by being silent.

17. QUESTIONS: Are you surprised when local farmers plant cotton, and cotton comes up? No. Why do you suppose they spend time, money and effort to get the weeds out of the cotton? Do you join them in prayer for rain so that they may have a bountiful harvest?

BACKGROUND: I was raised on a vegetable farm, which was our family business. I was the third generation on the farm. We were never surprised to see tomato plants come up where we had planted tomato seeds. It was the same with cabbage or cucumbers. Whatever we had planted came up. If we had put only a few seeds into the ground we knew we were going to get only a few plants. Of course, when we planted more seeds we got more plants.

We knew that the condition of the soil was important. We plowed the ground, fertilized it, worked the ground, and then planted the seeds. As the plants grew we removed weeds and irrigated when needed. As a result we expected and harvested that which we had planted. As a farm boy who was raised in a Bible-teaching church, I was not then surprised to learn from the Bible that the Lord said whatever we sow we shall reap [Gal. 6:7-8], and that if we sowed sparingly we would reap sparingly [2 Cor. 9:6]. That was understandable and reasonable to me. We did exactly that on the farm.

As I grew up I noticed that same principle working in my and others’ lives in regards to my behavior. Then, as I began my spiritual walk, I saw the same principle working between me, others, and the Lord. When I was generous [guided by faith, love and biblical wisdom and by the Lord’s voice] there was an abundant harvest, some of which would overflow to me and my family. The kingdom harvest and glory to Jesus was abundant.

PRINCIPLE: There are other principles at work in regards to the harvest. Jesus told a parable we usually call “The Parable of the Sower.” I understand it to be a parable of the seed, which is the word of God – Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23. Various things happened to the seed, but in every case the seed itself was good and adequate. It was the various things that happened to the good seed that made the difference come harvest time.

[Here we will switch from “seed” to “word.”] Some of the word of God goes to those who do not understand it [v. 4, 19], which does them no good for having heard it.

Other of the word went to those who received it with joy [v. 5-6, 21] but when God created occasions for living those words in life’s many external circumstances, self was more important than living God’s words.

Yet others heard and received the word and apparently made a good beginning but when soulish living became more important than living by the Spirit those hearers did not allow the word to produce its planned harvest [v. 7, 22].

Then there were those who had been prepared to hear the word and live it [v. 8, 23]. They produced a bountiful harvest.

PRINCIPLE: Another principle regarding the harvest is that strange seed may be planted among the good seed. God’s word is pure, true and productive. When and where it is pure the Spirit uses it to produce the character and works of Jesus – Gal. 5:22-24. When it is contaminated with sin, unrighteousness, and deception it produces an obviously contrary harvest of the flesh – Gal. 5:19-21. We are talking here of harvests within the organization called the church, commonly composed of two groups of people: 1) the church -- those born again of God by virtue of His having placed His Spirit within them and, 2) those who have been added to the roles of the church by other means and for other purposes – Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43. The mixture of the two groups is inevitable. Too much trying to determine the two, especially to separate them, leads to more misery in the church [and in heaven?]. Thus, we are instructed on how to co-exist.

18. The Lord often cautions me about judging adversely too quickly some of the “new” things happening in the church, anywhere. Things and people need not be perfect to be from Him, because He has only imperfect citizens to bear His name and equipment. On the flip side, things and people need not be of Him just because it/they seem to be spiritual. Because the Holy Spirit is currently renewing/reviving the congregation in which I teach and worship, I’m in a position to judge a) rightly and wrongly, and b) righteously and unrighteously [there being a considerable difference between right and wrong, and righteously and unrighteously – rightly is factually correct and wrongly is factually wrong, while righteously is attitudinally godly and unrighteously is attitudinally ungodly].

Then there are personal reasons for doing and saying things, which is fine except when they are not aligned with the Lord’s personal reasons. I recall that when the Charismatic Revival of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s was flowing through the world, its and our biggest resistance came from those of the already-established church, including those of the most recent Holy Spirit revival of late 1800 and early 1900. That surprised me at the time, because we spoke the same language, had the same spiritual gifts, and the same Bible and Lord. Those leaders told me in later years that they had rejected the Charismatic Revival because it had not originated in their churches. Since learning that, I have been extra careful to not reject new spiritual things on their immediate face value.

All of that reminds me of the sad story of an old prophet and a young prophet in 1 Kings 13. Read it, then join me in putting righteous evaluations before right ones, initially. In that sentence I mean to advise righteousness first, then correcting for accuracy, if needed.

19. When I hear that popular encouragement of, “Hang in there,” I sometimes change it to, “Rest in there.” In our cross-walk, peace comes with and promotes resting in the Lord; unrest comes with and promotes “hanging in.” So much of life must be continually released from our grip. Hanging on squeezes the life out of life.

“Some of us think holding on makes us strong; but sometimes it is letting go.” – Hermann Hesse [1877-1962], German-Swiss writer, poet and painter, Nobel Prize in literature, Protestant Christian and sometimes Buddhist.

20. “Never mistake motion for action.” – Ernest Hemingway [1899-1961], American author and journalist, Nobel Prize in literature, possible Catholic. That’s the opposite of the dyslexic imperative of: Don’t just do something; stand there!!”

21. If we were taking a written test in church, and we came to the question of whether the Bible is the word of God, I’m sure that almost everyone would answer “Yes.” But if the test monitor returned my test paper to me and said that I should answer that question according to the way I respond to/live by the contents of the Bible, I might rethink my answer. One approach to providing an accurate answer can be based on what is called the orthodox definition of what is a biblically submitted mind, which helps us by providing questions for coming to an accurate answer: 1) Does Scripture develop in me submissiveness to its author, Jesus Christ? 2) Does it produce church unity within me? 3) Does it reveal Christ to me, and in me? 4) Is it a personal word to me?

22. A teaching about personal responsibility before the Lord, and properly relating to civil and religious authorities. It would be best if you first read 1 Kings 13:1-34 or my comments will be too fragmented.

This happened in Israel [not in Judea] during the separation of God’s people, Israel, into a 10-tribe apostate northern kingdom [that continued calling itself Israel] and a 2-tribe less apostate southern kingdom [called Judea], during King Jeroboam’s reign over the northern kingdom. The altar in this chapter was the one in Bethel of the northern kingdom. Recall that all of God’s people were told to worship Him only at the altar in the temple at Jerusalem of Judea. The young prophet had come up from Judea to pronounce a word from God against the altar in Israel [which meant against the altar, the local priests, the king, and the nation].

Notice: Both the old prophet and the young prophet were truly God’s prophets. Both knew about their prophetic ministry. Both knew about honoring and respecting the “rank” within their religious profession.

The old prophet was willing to lie; the young prophet was willing to submit to the old prophet’s rank and order above God’s rank and order, although he had done well in not accepted the king’s [civil government] offers. He perceived error in accepting the King’s offer [why? – less hungry and thirsty from traveling while fasting; king not a religious authority and more obviously a tempter], but not in the old prophet’s offer [more hungry and thirsty, “job (almost) well done,” religious co-minister [prophet] so less obviously a tempter].

Was personal gain possibly involved for them both? The spiritually drying-up old prophet wanted a piece of the fresh spiritual action; the young prophet wanted a “spiritual covering” or “stamp of approval” or prestige among believers in the northern kingdom or perhaps saw an opportunity to be a “minister of unity” from the southern tribes to the northern tribes? Those reasons were good in themselves, but why did he disobey God?!!

Was the old prophet deceived, or did he simply lie [v. 18, he lied]? Was his sin a result of a desire to be a part of something God was doing [Yes, apparently]? Even at the young prophet’s expense [Yes; why do you suppose the old prophet lived and ministered in Israel at that altar instead of in Judah?]?

Allegorically, what is the Lion? The Lord, judge and avenger. The donkey? Simply an instrument, for good or bad. The old prophet? Those who previously responded to God but who have now compromised and know they are drying up, and who are willing to drag others into their wasteland. The young prophet? Those of a renewal who have come alive to God but choose to obey religious authority and tradition instead of God. The king? Civil government controlling religion, wanting only its benefits. Notice that the king [civil government] had taken over the religion [v. 33-34] and was saying exactly who the “church” was and was not, and that God’s judgment for such was severe and eventual.

23. I’ll share with you a copy of my teacher’s notes from a recent Bible Study. I had been asked to share some thoughts on “doctrine,” had seen a need for a refresher course on how to properly handle our smaller and more incidental sinnings, added a small comment on how we cannot always follow Jesus, and then went over some group behavior when God’s children are gathered together at His feet.

A. Doctrine: Dictionary definition – A principle [or group of principles] of belief.

Bible definition – A description of a way to live. Titus 1:9 (5-9); 2:1 (1-5); 10 (9-10).

Similar to the term “sound teaching” – 1 Tim. 1:10 (8-11).

The usual process is: first learning, then living. May be reversed: first living, then learning,

which requires a great measure of sensitivity to the Spirit. Testimony given.

Examples of Christian doctrine: 1) See above Scripture references.

2) There is a God – so all men should seek and obey Him.

3) Jesus is the Son of God – so I live with and for Him.

4) Jesus was crucified, died, buried, arose from the grave,

ascended to heaven and reigns over creation – so I fear

nothing.

5) We have been given His Spirit, making us part of God’s

eternal family – so I worship Him.

6) God loves me – therefore I love Him.

B. Let’s work our way through this:

1. I see that I come short [in various ways and to various degrees] in many thoughts and deeds,

especially when I remember that my only standard is that I be like my Father in heaven.

2. That helps me apply to myself the truth of Paul’s confession [spoken by him in the present tense,

not of his pre-Christian life] that he was the chiefest of sinners.

3. When I compare myself to God, I easily see that I am imperfect in every area. Although I know

that, I do not live in God- or self-condemnation, or with a sense of failure. Instead, expectancy.

4. When I am aware of an improvement in my righteousness I am encouraged to be more bold in

faith and obedience.

5. When I am aware of an imperfect deed, I see it as an area of my life in which the Lord is actively

working. As I live in faith regarding those God-active areas of my soul, they soon improve.

6. Along with my being convicted and repentant, I am also thankful for being shown the next area of

my soul that the Lord has selected for His improvement. He often reveals to me the route and

timing of my sanctification process.

7. The church that is in my life loves me with Jesus’ love, and is as patient with me as I am with them.

C. There is one thing for which we have not been provided an example in Jesus to follow. What is it? Answer: How to handle our sins. Why? He did not commit a sin, so we cannot see what His method may have been for handling them.

What are we to do? God’s plan is the other way around the problem, this time meaning, “No example to follow from the life of our perfect Exampler.” He decided to put His own earth-accomplished human righteousness into us as a replacement for our inadequate equipment that does not allow us to accomplish righteousness for ourselves. Then, because we have to live-out that righteousness [and we have old pre-replacement bad habits in our souls, which He had not], He set up a sin-conviction-repentance-forgiveness process so we can develop new perfect soul-habits like He had, without having to carry a load of accumulating sins. Strangely to our human thinking, for God’s process to work He requires something called “faith in His finished work in me.”

If we do well enough, He has even added individual rewards for the hereafter.

24. “Always seek out the seed of triumph in every adversity.” – Og Mandino [1923-1996], American author whose writings were inspired by the Bible. When he began reading good, positive books he went from being suicidal to eventually writing “The Greatest Salesman in the World,” which has been translated into over 25 languages and sold over 50 million copies. I never cease to be amazed at the effect of biblical thought on individuals and nations, and the consequences of the loss of the same.

25. For us Protestants this Thought comes under the title of “What can we learn and from whom can we learn it? For us Catholics it is entitled, “Now, hear this!”

We are indebted to those who have gone before, for examples of righteousness and unrighteousness. Although we can learn from anyone, I will limit this to learning from believers. If a definition is necessary for anyone, we will consider as Christian anyone who calls himself or herself Christian. Our guest teacher today is the current Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis.

On Monday, December 22nd, the Pope addressed the Curia [the equivalent of a Senate in the Roman Catholic Church]. According to the Corpus Christi Caller-Times of December 23rd, the Pope “issued a blistering indictment of the Vatican bureaucracy, accusing the cardinals, bishops and priests who serve him of using their Vatican careers to grab power and wealth, of living ‘hypocritical’ double lives and forgetting that they’re supposed to be joyful men of God.” It was a “public dressing down of the Curia … He made clear that his plans for a radical reform of the structures of church power must be accompanied by an even more radical spiritual reform of the men involved.” As they sat stone-faced before him, He urged them “to use the Christmas season to repent and atone and make the church a healthier, holier place in 2015.”

The Pope “had some zingers: How the ‘terrorism of gossip’ can ‘kill the reputation of our colleagues and brothers in cold blood.’ How cliques can ‘enslave their members and become a cancer that threatens the harmony of the body’ and eventually kill it off by ‘friendly fire.’ How some suffer from ‘spiritual Alzheimer’s,’ forgetting what drew them to the priesthood in the first place.”

This pope is the first pope from Latin America. He had never worked in the Italian-dominated Curia before he was elected. His speech had footnotes and biblical references. [It was reported, and observed by many of us on T-V, that there was little Christmas cheer in the room as he spoke, and scant applause at the end of his talk.] Furthermore, he reported that he and his nine key cardinal advisors are drawing up plans to revamp all bureaucratic offices, while stating that structural reform will be easier and quicker than spiritual reform.

Number one on the Pope’s list for change was the “ailment of feeling immortal, immune or even indispensable.” Some others on the 15 ailments list were, 2) being rivals and boasting, 3) wanting to accumulate things, 4) having a “hardened heart,” 5) wooing superiors for personal gain, 6) having a funereal face, 7) being too rigid, tough and arrogant, especially toward underlings, 8) working too hard [leading to being overstressed], and 9) planning too much ahead [saying that planning everything too much doesn’t allow for being surprised by the “freshness, fantasy and novelty” of the Holy Spirit].

“At the end of his speech, he asked them to pray that the ‘wounds of the sins that each one of us carries are healed’ and that the Church and Curia itself are made healthy.”

You recall that last summer this pope had a prayer meeting in his apartment with the President of Israel and his rabbis, the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority and his imams, and the Primate of the Eastern Orthodox Church and his priests – with each praying according to their own traditions. Then, also last summer, he went to an Italian Pentecostal-Evangelical church where he apologized for the Catholic Church’s longtime prejudices against that part of Christianity.

Now, let’s think a bit about what each of us can learn from our brother from Argentina, who worked as a night club bouncer before beginning his seminary studies.

26. My predominant burden of thought and of some teaching for the past few months has been for God’s people to know His ways. This burden has not been for the unsaved lost, but for the vast multitudes of believers [defining believers at this setting as anyone who claims to believe in Jesus Christ]. As when He walked the earth, and in the Great Commission [Matt. 28:18-20], the Lord focused on making disciples, not on people simply believing He was whom He said He was. In my experience, when the church is being the New Testament Full Gospel Church that Jesus said He would build, and as was shown us in Scripture [especially in the latter verses of Acts chapters 2 and 4] the Holy Spirit adds abundantly to the church daily.

You have noticed that the thrust of Hebrews, especially chapters 3 and 4, is that believers are in big-time trouble with the Lord when we live in unbelief [not when we occasionally slip into it]. He has sworn that unbelieving believers will not enter into His rest [that rest is not heaven]. That rest is the “Promised Land” here on earth; the place of fulfillment of soul, peace of soul, prosperity of soul, unity of the church, victory of the church, and awe of the unbelievers [some of whom pay the total price of jumping into the church and some of whom throw stones]. In short, it is entering into the fullness of God’s promises for us, even while still in our growth process.

The basis for that described unbelief is that so many of the church do not know God’s ways. See Hebrews 3:10-11. They know Him, having been snatched from the jaws of sin, death and hell, and plunged into God’s kingdom. But thereafter they have been taught to continue in a self-centered life, supposing that it is within their own ability and responsibility to define what is good and what is bad – Gen. 3. That line of definition goes like this: If it is painful it is not of God; if it is hard it is not of God; if it is sickness it is not of God; if it is a flat tire it is not of God; if it is death it is not of God [unless one is over something like 100 years of age]; etc. And, if it feels good it is of God; if it makes me/us happy it is of God; if it protects my health it is of God; if it prospers me financially it is of God, etc.

Don’t treat those lists lightly. Of course there are many exceptions but look instead at what I’m saying in the non-exceptions. Those are the ones that can show us that we do not know God’s ways. They drive our decisions and prayers, choose for us our friends and our futures, and dictate our walk with the Lord.

The example given us in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 is that of God’s people who were first delivered from the world, then put into a series of difficult daily and long-term situations. They wanted out. They complained against God and against the person whom God had chosen to show them the rightness and wrongness of their ways. They refused to learn His ways, therefore stayed longer in their misery, some even for the remainder of their lives. The promised place of fulfillment was always close at hand, but they refused to be prepared to enter it in faith. They did not know the ways of their God.

That’s us, church. It is amazing how the church prays for things that the Lord does not want us to have, and prays against things that He puts into our lives. Indeed, we pray for “good” things, as they prayed for the leeks and onions of their past, but they were not praying according to God’s will.

He chastises His children, which certainly is not pleasurable. I get the picture of a child being spanked by his loving father in a darkened room, not knowing that his afflictions are for correction and edification and are being administered by one who loves him and is giving himself for him. Suddenly someone turns on the room’s light and the child sees that it is his father who is doing that which is paining and offending him. His choice then is to repent of his ignorance and rebellion, or to decide that his father is not as loving as he had believed.

What will it be?