THOUGHTS OF JUNE, 2016

1. There is more good news for Christians. By the same faith that we exercised for coming to faith in Jesus we are also changed from day to day into His likeness as we walk with Him. That good news replaces the bad news that said we needed to change ourselves now that we are Christians. Before that bad news, the previous bad news was that we needed to save ourselves by being good enough and doing enough good works. So, the double dose of good news is that by faith in Christ we came to salvation, and by faith in Christ we are changed into His nature and likeness day by day.

By faith we accepted Christ; by faith we accept the sanctification of our souls; by faith we produce good works. If we don’t accept the truth that we are now the righteousness of God in Christ, we must get back to work in the flesh to clean up our act. Instead of that, our righteousness flows outwardly as we have faith in Him and His word that we are the righteousness of God in Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ in me – Gal. 2:20. That does not do away with the necessity of self-control of our outward behavior, but keeps us properly and effectively dependent upon the Lord for soul changes.

2. Can you remember ever having pleasure in someone being caught in sin? It may have been someone who was an enemy and you delighted in his/her exposure and punishment. Perhaps it was a friend or your spouse!? In that case you might have been delighted that now you had an upper hand, the upper position, the power of punishment and control. Sickening now, isn’t it!

When we get caught in sin, the Lord starts the opposite; He begins supporting us, lifting us up, even while He works to convict us. We are His family members; bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. He is alive in each of us, so we are to exercise His same life-giving grace toward one another.

3. Be constant and instant in prayer, but keep your prayers short – Eccl. 5:2. I keep mine short, but there are times when they get longer than my average. The longer ones occur mostly when I am behind on communicating with the Lord and have to catch-up on things before I can get to the subject. That’s not healthy.

4. If you are preoccupied with a desire for righteousness for yourself and others, keep going; you are on the right track. You will receive and see others’ righteousness. Your hunger and thirst will get you your righteousness and produce a broad social righteousness – Matt. 5:6. It will come about in this present earth-life, in the millennium and in the new heaven on earth. Don’t despair; it’s on the way and each step of improvement will be better and better. No need to be tolerant of unrighteousness, or content with only better. The real and total thing is coming. Continue hating sin and its effects. Mourn man’s inhumanity and rebellion. A better day is coming when righteousness will reign. So, stay hungry and thirsty. You will not be disappointed. “Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.”

5. How many times daily do you encounter inconveniencies? I’m mostly thinking of those inconveniences that we can decline simply on the basis that they are inconvenient. With some little or major adjustment on our part we could accommodate the inconvenient, if we were so inclined; if the other person was more important to me; or if I checked with the Lord a bit better. As said often before, every one of you is like exactly like I am, but variable in degrees of our likenesses. We are all imperfect in every aspect of our souls, ladies excepted.

Living according to what is convenient or inconvenient is on the disciple’s hit list. We live for others, not ourselves, and receive Life in return. That’ not to say that we never choose things we want to do, things special to us, but that we check our motives as well as our morals before we make our decisions. We consider others, especially the Lord. We are important to many others, and many others are important to us. That’s why we live outside of ourselves.

Then there is the “I gotta be ME!” spirit. It says, “How about me? Aren’t I important? Why don’t I get to do the things I want to do?” Of course we tend to ourselves and to our to desires, but we pass them through God’s filter. Jesus came to do His Father’s will, and commitment to our Father’s will is what sends us into the day. Living that way frees us from the chains of ME, MY, and MINE. It allows me to live in an intelligent freedom with a higher purpose than ME.

You know what I mean. Most of you were disciples [vs. camp followers] before we encountered one another along this Way. A disciple hears the Holy Spirit’s whispers; He tells us to put aside ourselves so we can hear Him and follow His leadership. We must draw near to Him and shut out the clutter because He is whispering, or simply playing on our heart strings. No loud commands; just a sweetness that leads us from the inside outwardly. It is another example of God’s life and power being released from us because of our “weakness,” enabling us to do that which we could not do on our own. That is discipleship.

6. Do you want it straight? O. K.: “The flesh” counts for nothing where that which counts is important!

7. Matthew 24:10-14 is about the condition of the church before Jesus’ return. That’s you and me. We need to take that to heart – a good place to start any self-examination. So how do you examine yourself? A bit of time in silence, alone with the Lord, asking and listening, will help most of us. Others will need the same ambience but with a saint who really knows us, has gone through the wars with us, is ready to sink or swim with us, and loves us enough to clearly speak the truth without measure. Fortunately, the Lord has supplied several [more!] of those saints in my life, and I have appreciated His grace. I have needed and used them. They are wonderful. You know who you are.

But look at those devastations: Falling away from the Lord [living for what they get out of life], betrayal of other Christians [not loving our brothers and neighbors as ourselves], hating other Christians [ibid.], being misled [not submitting to and following the Holy Spirit or Scripture], lawlessness [ibid.], love growing cold [the root of all problems between God and man], and not enduring the circumstances of life [losing our heavenly vision]. There is nothing new in that list, but they will abound at the end.

The Lord’s half-brother offered us a way to avoid or to dig our way out of those conditions. He gave us a big dose of self-responsibility in James 4:8-10. In short, he said, “Get serious. My big Brother conquered life, death, and the grave. He is the victorious King.” Paul said it this way, “When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.” Isn’t it tragic that after that victory much of the church at His return will have been self-demolished, and He already knew it?

Stand up!

8. Have you ever had to go back and start over? Oh, yes! That’s not only a senior citizen’s process when we forget what we came into this room for, or why we opened the frig door. Starting over is a necessity from our youth up. Crumbled drawing papers, broken marriages, replacement cars, all are signs of starting over.

If the church ever found itself weak and fruitless, compared to the example of how we should be as found in the Owner’s Manual, what might be our approach to starting over – just maybe? Might the way back be by wanting the Lord’s death instead of His goodies? That approach might involve self-denial, bearing our crosses daily, having confidence right in the middle of our weaknesses, being joyful in our trials, choosing to win by losing, working by resting, and accepting both bitterness and sweetness from the Lord. That’s big-time going back to the cross and starting over. Might it work? It did for Paul: “For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. – 2 Cor. 4:11.

9. Who exerts the most power over your life? After you give the obligatory answer of “God,” which human or humans would you name? Think of that question for a few days. Then start working your way out of any unholy situations, or go to them and thank them for their God-given place in your life. Some might be your children or grandchildren. Others may be military or civilian bosses. One may be in your marriage.

10. In the United States we have a Constitution that guarantees us things like religious liberty. Have you noticed that words printed on paper do not bring about those guarantees? Among an enlightened and virtuous populace, printed words would be enough, but when any of many possible pressures come against a voluntarily submitted-to document, the document can fail. It needs our support.

But, the Constitution says things such as our religious liberty are God-given rights! Again, have you noticed that when God or anyone else gives you something, you can still lose it? Neglect or theft are among the possibilities. So, what is to be done about others who take that which others and God give us? We cannot expect gifts and other property to be safe just because they were given by God.

Notice that we were not promised religious liberty, but that we were given a right to it. On the other hand, saints, we are promised persecution. That helps complete the picture, doesn’t it. Everything in that Constitution had, has, and will always have to be maintained through alertness, faithfulness and all types of sacrifice.

God has a design for governments. His best design is an absolute dictatorship with Him as Dictator. Until He gets that set up, there are all forms of governments that are trying to do good, and all forms of governments that appear to be trying to do bad. God’s kingdom is alive and in a variable state of health within them all, and absolutely healthy over all of them. As Christians, generally we apply ourselves to the development of governments that relate best to the people. We don’t yet have the kingdom of God display which is to come, but since it is God’s plan for us to live responsibly in the presently dual kingdoms of God and of the world, we do. That will soon change.

11. Isn’t it wonderful that God has the nature of a father! Our personal experiences with fathering and being fathered certainly can taint our understanding of how a father is, but most of us have a goodly picture that favorably compares to the fatherhood of God. Think of it! He wants us to call Him Father. What a givenness to such as we are, from the All-Mighty Creator and Sustainer of all things. I know of no other “god” who presents himself to humanity in that way. Then He follows His presentation with actions that clearly define fatherhood.

The whole family of God situation is mind boggling. Because He is our Father, we are all His kids. He is “our” Father. I did not have a vote when He decided to include you in this family. We are in. He is not the personal possession of any of us. His fatherhood is the basis of our relationship, fellow God-people. The problems we have within the family are designed to clean us up [from acting like our previous father’s, Satan’s, children] and to draw us closer together, not to further separate us. Until we get sonship and brotherhood established in our minds, feelings, and living we remain in a constant state of stressful self-reinterpretations of it all. That has led us into being God’s dysfunctional family, yet we are more family than we know.

12. Have you noticed that birds must fly and fish must swim? Also, that through believers must flow rivers of life – John 7:38? J. H. has commented on the 19 pages of THOUGHTS OF MAY, 2016. Each one and group of the Lord’s rivers has our own course, flow, depth, width, intensity, etc. Let the living waters flow. Freely we have received; freely we give.

You know that these THOUGHTS are without charge, but I do appreciate your comments in return.

13. What are the things that prevent your being totally available to the Lord, meaning anything from doing something in your home, to going to darkest Africa? You might want to make a list of why you are unavailable to Him – the things that, if He called you, would render you unable to respond. It could include age [Moses at 80], danger [Peter in Matthew 26], religious bias [Peter in Acts 10], simple fear [Ananias in Acts 9], family response [Jesus in Mark 3:21, 31-35], financial questions [disciples in Mark 6], personal inadequacy [Moses in Ex. 3:11; 4:10], and a misfocus on our human vs. God’s ability [Ex. 4:1]. The Lord knows all, and He works in our souls to show us what He knows about us.

Knowing the truth frees us to walk out of yet more of our dark corners into more of His bright light. I have noticed that when He is about to do something I consider “big” in my life, He tunes me up as needed for the occasion. He had me [us] give away our home before He began revealing our next big step; we did, then He did. How do you know you are available to Him? Look for the possible obstacles to your availability. God is greater.

14. Both mercy and truth are helpful if we are to get straight with the Lord and to stay straight with Him? The same applies to getting straight with one another. The truth must come clear and we must not weave about and dodge it. Mercy attracts us to the humbling processes of repentance and confession. Do your kids and friends [and colleagues and business associates] know that you are a person of mercy and truth? See Proverb 16:6. Why not let them experience you that way today?

15. When you meet someone, what two things do you use to promptly size them up? How about: a) At first sight it may be their clothing and demeanor; that being very important for first impressions. b) A little later it might be whether they are warmhearted and respectable, especially if this meeting has potential for a personal relationship. c) Next it might be whether they are trustworthy and competent, the “meat and potatoes” of sizing up others, especially if business is involved. We do that sort of thing automatically, don’t we. It’s a progressive evaluation, going from A to B to C at whatever speed necessary for the need. Are you fast and accurate at it?

16. “Ask and you shall receive,” said the Lord. Have you noticed that we receive much without asking, and that we receive much without asking specifically? Over the years I have seen myself asking for the Lord’s help for myself or others but telling Him less about how or when His help is to be delivered, and not even in what form the help should be. More frequently in recent years, I have been asking according to my or others needs and leave the works and results to the Lord. Before I had that prayerful habit I had asked very specifically and did not have many of my prayers answered according to my specific requests – but in time I noticed that they were eventually and remarkably well answered! So, I have backed off of detailing how I think the Lord should respond. Yet, I don’t mind saying to Him what I think would be a good idea. As my overall faithfulness and abiding pleases Him more, I think my desires will more accurately match with His plans and I may again become more specific, more able to accurately express His will before He acts – John 15:7.

James [4:3] said we ask amiss. Asking amiss does not mean we were asking badly, but asking wrongly. With our limited minds we cannot understand and work with the millions of factors the Lord considers when answering one “small” request.

17. At its best, the governments of this world cannot touch the governmental quality and strength of Christ’s kingdom. They may have a slight peek into Christ’s kingdom’s ways, but dare not appropriate them. The world’s governments know that to love their enemies would be suicide. In Christ’s kingdom loving our enemies produces Life, not death. The best the world’s kingdoms can do in that direction is to first defeat their enemies, then lift them out of defeat into restored health and international unity. I suppose that is the best that the Lord plans for them also, because He has ordained that governments of this world bring the sword against evil doers – Rom. 13:1-7. Those individuals who live under the rule of world governments but are also obedient citizens of Christ’s kingdom personally can do better.

18. Believers, do you find yourself at least a bit worried about the severity and frequency of your sins? Are you tempted to believe that the Lord made a mistake when He rebirthed you? Take heart. Nobody can produce new evidence of your depravity that will make God change His mind about having selected you out of this world for adoption into His family. God justified you [gave you standing before Him as if you had never sinned] “with His eyes wide open.” He knew it was your sins that cost Him His Son, and He knew the worst about you when at the time He accepted you for Jesus’ sake. His decision, then made, is still and forever final. J. I. Packer [1926 – present], British-born Canadian evangelical Christian theologian, formed up that Thought and passed it on to us.

19. As the church system continues going along with the world, some Christians are falling for the “judge not, lest you be judged” trap. That is a whitewash of sin that makes us all look so loving, accepting, and tolerant. It’s as if the Bible has become a pesky little book that became outdated some time during the last 2,000 years. The history of mankind, as shown in or out of the Bible, is that righteousness and simple rightness comes and goes in empires and nations, whether the church is present or not, and that righteousness exalts them while unrighteousness ruins them. God’s word easily judges those who desire His judgments. Properly judging makes a difference now and later.

20. What do you think is the main cause of human stress, overall? My observation is “money.” The main cause is variable from person to person and time to time and place to place, of course, but overall I think it is money. Again in my observation, it is the same in the church.

In the small countryside church of my youth I could not understand the burden that many of the adults had for “lost souls.” They would pray and weep for them, which at the time was way over my spiritual head. At that age I was not privy to any financial situations, at home or at church, so cannot make a comparison between their possible financial stress and lost souls stress.

21. I know something about you. You have never had a shortage of love.

Your and my problem was that early-on it was self-love and love of many other things; just not love of God. That has been corrected, has it not?

22. It seems that the European Union is coming apart, peacefully, as opposed to the United States with our Civil War in the mid-1800s. I’m sure that there are many reasons for the EU’s divide, but one large reason is that the average citizen is being ignored while an elite leadership is devising social, financial, and political changes that ignore basic truths about human nature and important social traditions. The new changes being pushed are 1) unfettered individual choice [by lots of foreigners] and 2) radical autonomy [thus a splintering of society]. The leaders are not responsive to what the voters consider common sense and reality. Slowly, the political system is moving away from democracy.

That is causing a problem with the United States. The EU leaders are leading the EU into a supranational organization, where the very core powers of nations and the EU are transferred not only from the people and their nations, but from the EU itself. The pressure that is being put on the United States and our constitutional government is intense. We are cultural kissing-cousins to the EU, so their idea of global governance will be enticing to us. Since the EU is really in its formative stages, it has lots of birth pangs yet to be endured. Unlike the United States in our beginnings, the EU is not openly and intrinsically Christian. That is a big weakness in any union, be it of two persons or multiple nations.

23. Margaret Thatcher knew that the welfare state was harming her fellow citizens and damaging the moral fabric of the United Kingdom. She worked to reduce the welfare system to a last resort for the poorest but not for the working class, knowing that the middle and high income class would succeed on their own energy with personal provisions. Her efforts succeeded.

At the time, the Church of England blamed her for the Kingdom’s social malaise. Not only was that not true, but the Church itself was to blame for that malaise. Now the Church is seeing the truth, and is speaking to itself and the Kingdom about having misunderstood Mrs. Thatcher’s motivations and having not seen the truth of her principles. Hers was the moral Christian perspective as she stood against the forces of religion. Perhaps the liberal churches in America are watching, also.

24. More on Margaret Thatcher. She continued to serve her nation and church despite their strong opposition, much as did Daniel in Babylon. Strong opposition against him did not make Daniel turn against Babylon in its persecution of him. As you hear the lions roaring in their den, keep speaking up and testifying to God’s goodness while you serve those pagan powers. If you do, in God’s time they also will fret at the thought of losing you – Dan. 6:10-28.

25. We need to think about ourselves, judge ourselves, know ourselves. Question: How highly or lowly do you think of yourself? On a scale of 0 to 10, where do you rank yourself? You know that in your flesh [the old self apart from God] you are and have nothing good in you. That rates a “0.” But as a believer in Jesus Christ the new you is a renewed person, now alive to God by His Spirit within you, a child of God forever as we see our soul getting better every day. In that perspective, how do you rate yourself? Much better, I hope. Still, we are not to rate ourselves too highly. We are urged to use the sound judgment of our spiritually alive, biblically informed minds to rank ourselves on our current measure of Christ’s faith. Yes, rank our faith compared to Christ’s faith. That sort of thinking, judging and knowing ourselves is designed by the Lord to be healthy for us. See Romans 12:3.

26. This is a mini-teaching or maxi-thought on God’s favor, or blessedness.

The first and foremost thing to be said about God’s favor is, “Don’t lose it!” You had God’s favor at the moment you were born into His family. When I was born again at age 11 I didn’t know what to do with it. Gradually the “just be good” advice failed, and I wasn’t. Simple imperfection and sinning won’t lose God’s favor, according to the testimony of Scripture. But, we must know that we can lose it – not lose our forever membership in His family, not lose our eternal salvation into heaven vs. going to hell, not lose His love for us, not lose His presence in and with us, and not lose His hand upon us. But we can lose or gain His favor; His favor being defined as the ongoing, steady process of being especially blessed by God, especially given to by God, and especially receptive of God essentialities.

The second thing to be said about God’s favor is, “If you don’t have it, get it.” His favor does not come and go by such as our minute to minute performance, but comes and goes according to the substance of our abiding in Him, the quality of our heart’s desire for Him, the reality of our humility before Him, and the outworking of those qualities in our actions. In short, God’s favor is earned through grace, faith and works.

Man’s favor comes to us the same way as does God’s favor, so man’s favor toward us can be a gauge or report card for how we are doing with God’s favor, including in the reverse [John 15:20; 2 Tim. 3:12]. Notice this with Samuel [1 Sam. 2:26] and Jesus [Luke 2:52]. Notice, too, that all who have God’s favor are not granted man’s favor, as Moses in Egypt with Pharaoh, Job in his trials, Jesus in His ministry during His age 30 to 33, and the living testimony of Paul the apostle.

How may we obtain God’s favor? 1) Keep God’s commandments [Prov. 3:1-12], 2) seek and find God’s wisdom [Prov. 8:32-35], 3) diligently seek good [Prov. 11:27; 12:2], and 4) live in a righteous community [Prov. 14:9]. I will add: 5) Keep short your list of personal requests. 6) Watch what the Lord is doing, and get in step with Him in your prayers, teachings, counseling, and actions. 7) Don’t be led by what is simply “good.” In short, our focus when seeking God’s favor is to seek Him, not His things.

What are the benefits of having God’s favor? 1) Answers our “prayers” to humans [Esther 7:3], 2) God’s protection [Ps. 5:11-12], 3) LIFE received [Ps. 30:1-5], 4) enemies defeated [Ps. 41:9-12], and 5) God’s mercy received [Ps. 119:57-64]. I will add a sixth, the fellowship of Jesus’ sufferings [Phil. 3:10]. That No. 6 may be shown by His taking us into and through trials – Job, Jesus, us. This is important because God’s favor may be given only spiritually, not temporally. Nothing happens to us apart from His excellent and customized purposes.

God’s favor may be experienced as an abundance of good temporal stuff and life [health, wealth, and happiness], or during a lack of those things. Our favor may be seen only as gifts, ministries and fruit; or be seen only by those who have eyes to see spiritual favor during our temporal trials, which may be persecutions for righteousness sake, chastisements, or prunings.

The best of God’s favors are those received “only” as promises while in this earth-life [Heb. 11:13-16]. See more on that in Thought No. 27.

Don’t forget that unbelievers find favor with God: 1) Pharaoh through his Israeli slave Joseph [Gen. 41], 2) Naaman through his Israeli girl slave [2 Kings 5:1-3, 15-19], 3) Cyrus through his Israeli slave prophets [Is. 44:28 🡪 45:7], 4) Nebuchadnezzar through his Israeli slave Daniel [Dan. 2:36-38], and 5) an unnamed Roman centurion’s slave through subjugated Jesus and other subjugated faithful Israelites [Luke 7:2-10]. Do you see it? Unbelievers find God’s favor through their natural relationships with properly relating, often suffering, faithful believers. Our responsibility is to establish and maintain those natural relationships so the Lord can show Himself to the unbelievers.

27. This is a Thought that has to have balance, there being two sides to a piece of bread no matter how thin you slice it. The Thought: Faithful believers have testimonies of the Lord promising something, and of His fulfilling that promise. I am talking about specific promises that He whispered into the ear of our soul, not something we wanted and that we hoped He would eventually do. And I am not speaking here of the promises in Scripture that are spoken to all who believe. I’m speaking of something we knew the Lord said He would do. It is important that we know He will always keep His promises, because there are “delays.” [The Lord has His own schedule and nothing delays Him.]

In Hebrews 11, God’s Hall of Fame, He twice points out two things: 1) He promised some on-earth things to those saints, and He delivered during their earth-lives. 2) He promised other on-earth things to those same saints, and He did not deliver during their earth-lives. Their believing and receiving was part of His plan, as was their believing and not receiving, but not receiving did not bother [cause despair or unbelief in] those faithful ones. Verses 13-16 say that they died with still-alive faith despite not having received that which God promised them because they had 20/20 distant vision. They possessed those things promised beginning from the time of their promising. That sort of faith testifies that they were free from earthen bondage [including that the Lord must do what He said “in my life-time”]. That faith proclaimed that they were already citizens of heaven; that they were already living in the heavens [like we who now are in Christ at the right hand of God]. They did not need to live their faith to that extent, but chose to live it – verses 14-15. But because they did choose to trust God for His timing for the fulfillment of His promises, God was not ashamed to be called their God. Notice, saints, that that statement in verse 16 says that He is ashamed to be called God by some of us [??]. It ends with the promise to give them in the hereafter that which they believed for on earth.

28. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote a letter to the believers in Ephesus. This Thought is based around chapter 4, verses 7-16. He told them that when the Lord Jesus (re-)ascended into the heavens, He gave the church some special aspects of Himself. His list of five aspects/ministries/gifts were apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Their five-fold ministry is one ministry – the good news ministry of Christ, divided into five anointing-types of presentations much as God is divided into three person-presentations of His one-self. When joined together, any grouping of those five ministries presents the healthy, accomplished ministry of Christ. The gifts are the people in whom the Spirit works in those five distinct ways, as the Spirit had worked in Christ. The gifts are people, like Christ was the gift.

One point here is that we are to receive these people into functionality in the church. We are to encourage their development, not reject them, except on occasion of their moral or ministry failure. Even in those cases, as brothers in Christ, they should be embraced for healing and restoration, but that is not the point of this Thought.

Our point is that much of the five-fold ministry of Christ is missing or is weak in the church today – even denied. Jesus’ ministry was given in this five-fold way so that the church would be equipped for the work that He has for us, so that He who said He would build His church could indeed build His church, with proper workmen and properly prepared material. How long did Jesus think that would take? His answer, given in advance, is “until we all grasp and live in faithful unity, until we have an intimate life together with Jesus, and until He has produced a church that has the maturity and fullness of Jesus.” All of that “until-ness” still remains in the future. So, how much longer? The Holy Spirit knew that we would fracture the church, rebel, blame one another for our divisiveness, be complacent, see no need for changing our status quo, be unrepentant, and reject the five-fold ministry of Christ among us according to our best judgment [Judges 21:25], so He gave us those “until” verses to both convict and encourage us.

However, we are also given the results that we can expect when He builds His church with the material that His ministry prepares. He says we will no longer be spiritual babies [by His definition], we will no longer be subject to divisive doctrines [not necessarily meaning we would all believe absolutely the same in every respect, but that we would not allow division based on unreconciled theological points], we would see through the tactics of the devil [Wow; how we have fallen!], but would be speakers of the truth in love [or otherwise keep our ignorance and divisiveness to ourselves], and would be grown up in every way, like was and is Christ. It is not the Lord of the Church who has withdrawn Himself from the construction of His architectural wonder. He has not broken His contract/covenant. Adequate material is lacking.

Construction resumes only where believers humble themselves before God and man, love God and one another as Jesus loved His Father and us, and get on with LIFE.

29. The world was not doing well at all. All sorts of differences were building up between every two or more of us, and humanity was becoming unbearable. We were presented with an incurable condition. But our human differences were miniscule when compared to the differences that existed between us and God. Our little gaps were nothing compared to that gap. Then the gospel was given. The reason we quickly called it the gospel is because God in His mercy removed the gap that existed between us and Him. He did it on His own, through His Son, Jesus Christ, not through requiring more of us or by simply lowering the bar. Immediately that was good news, and still is.

Yet, we do not, and probably cannot, realize the depth of that good news about God and man until we realize that it equally applies between man and man. Perhaps the measure of our human to human goodness is a measure of our human to God goodness. It is senseless to continue living in the finite differences between us while basking in our infinitely wonderful closeness with and love for God.

30. The Lord is also working to show us the equalization of humanity in His kingdom -- in His family and in Christianity’s ambient culture because of our presence. When we have, we share with others; when we lack, others share with us – right? The only things we really have are our salvation and our laid-up rewards in heaven. The rest is for us to use and share here and now. Therefore, among Christians, the poor now become the remembered of God and the rich do not later become the forgotten of God. What a wonderful Equalizer!

31. Why can’t we serve more than one master? We have many levels of governmental authority over us. We have bosses and regulators on our jobs. There are many authorities we must obey, especially because the Lord has told us to obey them. That’s a clue; that He has told us to obey them – short of sinning.

Then we have the masters of money, property, health, prestige, self-image, pride, social position, and many others. The key to having only one master is in submitting all other masters to Jesus Christ. We really cannot serve two or more masters. But the problem is simplified by remembering that there is only one opponent to Jesus in this matter of submission. That is ME. My self is my opponent. It is hard for the Big Me to enter into Christ’s kingdom – Mark 10:23-25. To enter into Christ’s kingdom means to enter into Christ’s rulership over me. There is only one ruler per standing kingdom.

32. The most powerful antipoverty tool in the world is a job. Jobs are the only permanent solutions to poverty. Businesses [jobs] are great for social health. Jobs are more plentiful in those parts of the world where it is easy to start and do business. That’s another example of freedom being an essential quality in almost everything. Giving to the poor is short-term help; setting them free and getting out of their way are their next steps to success.

33. It’s good to listen to a friend’s complaints for a while, but don’t leave without asking him for his solutions. Help him off of his hard place.

34. Are you noticing that when religion and culture falter, our default is politics? Watch the news.

35. Our daily situations are natural occasions that express pertinent spiritual activity. It’s simple. If you break your leg, look at your behavior in relation to the accident. The Lord might show you something about yourself, or start you on a program that prepares you for your future. Or, a sudden flare-up of anger may signal something important in your soul, and that it is the Lord’s time for improvement.

36. I think, read, talk and write a lot, but [almost] every word I say, I mean. Some are still idle chatter. Our assignment is to make all of our speech truthful and of high quality. It is encouraging to see some improvement in this way over these 86 years. Given another 86 I might be worth listening to. I know that as a Christian I have something to say, but truth and quality are the targets.

37. The Lord said that He [and others] would judge us in the way that we judge others. That softens me as I make necessary judgments day in and day out. It’s not a matter of accuracy, but of attitude. It seems a good thing to use that principle and add: “Love others in the way you want to be loved,” “Help others the way you want to be helped,” “Be patient with others the way you want others to be patient with you,” “Give to others the way you want others to give to you,” etc. That’s the same as when our moms said, “Well, if you don’t want her to stick her tongue out at you, don’t stick yours out at her.” Life in the kingdom is as simple as life in the world.

38. And, are you living the resurrected life offered you? Check yourself out: Are you afraid to die? Are you afraid you will go broke financially? Are you afraid you will not have enough to eat? Notice in each case that fear is presence, not simply a consideration of a possibility. Dead people living resurrected lives do not fear. If you are living the resurrected life, you don’t fear. If you are living alive to yourself, you fear. Once you have passed from life into death and into Life, fear has no grip on you. If it rears its head, put it down.

I once told a nervous Roman bishop, when it looked like we might crash in the mountains, that if our Father wanted to plant us on a mountain side, that was fine with us. That little reminder was all he needed to re-relax. He had long since passed from life into death into Life and, once encouraged, easily rejected the temptation to fear.

39. I think it is accurate to say that in heaven God’s will is perfectly done. So, when we pray, as in the Lord’s Prayer, for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven we are praying for His will to be done 100% perfectly on earth. When you pray the Lord’s Prayer you are praying that for yourself.

Breaking earth-time into Old Testament, New Testament, Millennium, and eternity shown in The Revelation chapters 21 and 22, it looks like our prayers for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven will not occur until the time of those last two chapters. Imagining life in the Millennium is somewhat possible, but it is difficult for me to imagine life in those two chapters – absolute perfection, including in people who started life and processed this far as we have done. We have a way to go!

We are still along the way, so check-out your trust in God’s will. When you ask Him to lead your life into His will, do you sigh with relief and joy? Or, do you duck your head and prepare for God’s heavy feet on you? It’s possible that we pray for His will and do everything possible to avoid His free hand. We are His projects.

40. In a similar Thought, when we pray for our daily bread we are making a tremendous request based on our tremendous commitment. I feel safe saying that each of us had more than today’s needs -- more than today’s need of bread in any form [food, money, shelter, etc.]. But in our “give us our daily bread” we are praying for our daily bread, meaning corporate bread provision. The situation is that I have more than enough for today, while others have less than enough for today. What I’m praying is for the Lord to move some of mine to theirs. That brings up: Why am I praying for that to happen? Why don’t I just do it? The church cooperates in seed planting, watering, weeding, harvesting, storage and disbursement. Where am I in that process? In this scenario, I may be praying for the Lord to provide the needs of my neighbor through others, not through me.

In the wilderness with Moses, God’s people received manna one day at a time [enough on Friday to be gathered twice as much so that no gathering and cooking would be done on Saturday]. That manna from heaven was their daily bread for physical life, fresh daily. Two-day old manna got stale and rotted. So does our old manna get stale, it being our stale prayers, our stale testimonies, our stale relationships with God and man, our stale obediences. We must keep all of life fresh and alive, not allowing our bread to get stale and moldy and rotten. That applies to marriages, friends, fellowship in the church, and our relationship with the Lord.

Fresh manna is being sought by others. If we have it, others will feed on us, will gather from us. The Lord is and has that fresh Manna. It smells and tastes fresh. We can get it fresh daily. His manna can be gathered, brought into our tents, and made into something desirous and nutritious.

41. We opened with good news in Thought No. 1, and will close with more good news [perhaps there even was some in between]. This Thought will not cover the entire Gospel in its topic.

It is my personal desire and prayer for you that you realize that for years the Lord has been fulfilling His purpose for you in your life. No one else could have done what you and He have done. No one else could have lived-out the particular relationships as you have lived them. You were put into creation, molded and called to be what you have been, including and despite your soul-warts.

You failed along the way – missed the mark that you strove for [but aimed for it anyway], stepped across the line wrongly [presumed on God’s grace too much], accidently slipped down while trying [and doing] your best, and failed to pay fully that which you knew you owed to the Lord [no way you could have done otherwise]. All the while you have been watched over and formed by the Lord who chose you despite knowing **ALL** about you from before the beginning of time, and still choosing to have you with Him forever. You invited Him to work His best for you, and He is.

He chose you, a sinner among sinners, to become His dearly beloved still-sinning child, headed with Him into a future when you will never again sin, will see Him face to face, and enjoy perfect peace with Him. He has worked on you continually, 24/7. He has not loved you less when you failed, but has rejoiced when you turned to Him with your broken heart so He could fix you better than before you failed. That part was built-in up front with Adam; it was not a Plan B. When Jesus said, “You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect,” that was more than a command; it was a prophetic statement. Selah.

You had an incurable disease but He healed you, and you are going to get only better. Along the way He has made you respectable in the eyes of others, acceptable in their more-gracious presence, enjoyable at their tables even during some of your worst times. [You really should remember those times, and rejoice!] You have never been an afterthought. He has never reconsidered having chosen you. He has not been impatient or pushy [except when your heart was in it but your head wasn’t]. In short, the Lord is more satisfied with you than you are. Your best is yet ahead, in this earth-life and beyond.

Let the Lord know your regrets, take your spiritual bath, then walk away from them, thankful and rejoicing. Life is in the onward and upward direction.