THOUGHTS OF APRIL, 2013

First, a special question for April: Does God know what He is doing – with this big, complex, modern world and with little, simple, sinful “me?”

That which we believe, shows in the way we live. We always have a grander knowledge bank and intellectual belief than living faith/belief [what we live by daily]. Clue: When in prayer, do you inform the Lord of what is going on and what He might do about the situation? That indicates that you don’t really think the Lord is involved on the “every hair on my head” level.

If you can get yourself into my question without pitching in a thoughtless, cover-every-situation, theological answer, consider those whose names are already on God’s list of little, simple, sinful people whom He knew before they were conceived in their mothers’ wombs but chose “anyway,” then used, and now holds up before us as examples of faith:

Adam and Eve: Perfect wife, perfect marriage and perfect environment, walked and talked with God. Turned all into misery, grief and toil.

Abraham: God’s most grand example of faith and obedience. Lived a lie about Sarah being his sister, disbelieved God’s promise about a son so had Ishmael by Hagar. Misery, grief and toil.

Jacob/Israel: God’s choice for fathering the 12 tribes and for whom the nation is named. Deceived anyone to get what he wanted. Misery, grief and toil.

Samson: Anointed as a judge-deliverer of Israel. Womanizer. Misery, grief and toil.

Samuel: Mighty prophet, anointed David to be the king of Israel. Raised 2 unrighteous sons into the priesthood, which ended the time of the judges. Misery, grief and toil.

David: The apple of God’s eye, shepherd-king of Israel. Murdering adulterer. Misery, grief and toil.

Solomon: The wisest man in the world. Did more stupid things than anyone [Everyone say, “Even more stupid things than I have done.”]. Misery, grief and toil.

Jonah: God’s prophet. Despised God’s mercy. Misery, grief and toil.

Peter: One of the inner 3, a natural leader. Lied under oath against Jesus. Misery, grief and toil.

James: The leader of the church in Jerusalem, Jesus’ half-brother, the Holy Spirit inspired him to write a book of the New Testament. Thought Brother Jesus was emotionally imbalanced, formed a group that tried to grab Him and force Him to come back home.

The point: Weak men who loved God were greatly used although they almost destroyed themselves, others and their ministries. God knew exactly what He was doing. Lesson: God delights in doing the impossible with nothing -- 2 Cor. 4:7; 1 Cor. 1:26-29. That applies 100% to us!

Another point: God is deliberate – Rom. 9:10-18. We have not raised up ourselves, presented ourselves to the Lord, saved ourselves, appointed ourselves, nor brought ourselves to our present situation in life. He did it all. He is committed to “dragging us through our muck” to bring us into His glory. He is able.

If we can identify ourselves among those listed people, God’s chosen and developed examples of faith, we will be strengthened in the knowledge that God knew what He was doing when He chose and is developing “me.”

 Now into THOUGHTS OF APRIL, 2013:

1. Human meekness is often a result of fear or depression. Fear includes that which we call timidity. It is self-centered, self-protective and passive. Strangely, it can be associated with pride and arrogance, in the sense that a meek person can think himself better than others, especially if he lacks power or authority and needs an alibi, does not make difficult decisions and so makes only a few enemies [actually, that’s spineless passivity]. These people lead a difficult life and come to a bad end.

Holy meekness knows its possessor is no better than others, so is not easily lifted up above others [by them, himself or the situation]. Any power or authority possessed is under control of love, not self-motivation. It is focused outwardly and used for the well-being of others. Therefore, although the person may be negated and persecuted, holy meekness is lasting, eternal and cannot be quenched. These people will inherit the earth. That’s a good step toward a blessed life.

2. Josiah Gilbert Holland, American writer and poet, noticed “that which grows fast, withers as rapidly. That which grows slowly, endures.” I don’t think he was talking about plants and animals, but people. I don’t know how accurate that observation is, but we have all seen flashes who quickly flamed out, and plodders who continued plodding until they were ahead of their peers. The tale of the tortoise and the rabbit comes to mind.

Some of us seem to need lots of activity continually [hopefully associated with growth], others only in spurts after some quiet time, but others no spurts at all as they simply and quietly grew. It seems to me that all of that is up to the Lord. He has created us, our personalities, planned our courses, and is with us to do that which is His good will. We are on His time and place, crawl or spurt schedule.

3. Here is another quote that comes to us from the Lord, but through a naturally-minded person, with very little degradation or modification in the process. Georges-Louis Leclerc , French naturalist, mathematician, cosmetologist and author said, “Hold on; hold fast; hold out. Patience is genius.” Hold for how long? Hold through what? Hold alone? Can we hold “on, fast, and out” for too long?

Only those who will risk going too “on, fast and out” can possibly find how far one can go with the Lord.

4. What do you do [how do you handle it] when your prayers are not answered? The following is a list of how some of us handle it, and I will mix biblical with non-biblical ones. You can do the exercise of sorting them out.

 a. “I don’t have enough faith to get my prayers answered.”

 b. “I’m too sinful for Him to answer my prayers.”

 c. “God usually answers ‘No’ when I pray.”

 d. “The Lord stores up prayers that He does not answer, and answers them at another time.”

 e. “I usually forget to first ask the Lord how to pray. Anyway, when I ask Him, He doesn’t tell me.”

 f. “I think that I have to decide for myself how I should pray about things. Is that a problem?”

 g. “I pray only for good results. I’m confused about why the Lord doesn’t do what I ask.”

 h. “At this time in history, it is not God’s plan to answer prayer; at least not many prayers.”

 i. “Prayer just doesn’t work for me, so I have about given up on it.”

There may be something applicable to each of us in one or more of those statements. I will now give us a list of things to do that, if we do them, will change our attitudes and experiences about the Lord, talking to Him [prayer], results of our prayers, relationships to others [many of whom are of social groups that we do not appreciate], and our selves.

 a. Ease-up on those over whom you have responsibility and authority. Get into their lives.

 b. Ask your mate and best friend and worst enemy [that’s supposed to be 3 different people] to tell you where to begin humbling yourself.

 c. Forgive someone of something tangible, like a financial debt. Tell them so.

 d. Give food to someone – a neighbor, a stranger. Just do it, like pay a stranger’s bill at the fast food place.

 e. Bring someone home and give them a place to sleep. One night will do for a beginning. After all, that is just a beginner’s move.

 f. When you see someone who needs clothes, take him into a store and dress him, or take him home and give him some from your closet [he makes the selection].

 g. If your good-for-nothing brother-in-law needs help [again], help him. It doesn’t have to be the kind of help or how much he asks for, but help him. Smile.

Only those who will risk going too far in the above [and other things God-customized for us] will find out how far one can go with the Lord.

Do those things and your reputation in heaven will precede you in all of your ways. The Lord will be your rearguard, meaning He will take care of the consequences that follow “behind you” as you faithfully do those things. Then you will call to the Lord and He will hear you and will answer, “Here I am.” You will be a well-watered garden. He will guide you to dry places where you will be a spring of water that does not fail. The effect you will have on others will bring them to Life. Those who had come from many generations of ruin will rebuild that which had become ancient ruins, laying solid foundations in the process. You will be called “the restorer of the breech.”

If you need direct Scripture verification, read Isaiah 58:1-12. My adaptation is meant to make those verses easier to understand. Do them and you shall live. You won’t even find yourself hoping that your prayers will be answered because Romans 8:32 will simply be real. We will have that which we desire – Jesus, and He will be bringing forth that which has been deposited in us.

5. Perhaps no solitary person is called to God’s purposes alone and meant to remain alone. If the Lord is going to accomplish much, each person must go beyond that good first step of, “It’s me and Jesus.” A lone disciple on the battlefield can be a hero but not accomplish much. The Lord came to not only save individuals, but to build a body, a spiritual family. Therefore, disciples are led together into spiritual, natural groups. It is then that Jesus’ invitation to the remainder of the world has the form and power to mean something to that world. Others have something to join to, and Christ Jesus begins to be given the preeminence in all things, so that God may be all in all – Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 15:28.

6. “When a true genius appears in this world, you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him.” – Jonathan Swift

That also applies to true religion, as in Jesus’ case and anyone who pursues God considerably beyond the status quo.

7. So very much of life is filled with opinions, in and out of the church. For example, we have opinions on which day of the week we should hold weekly services. Most of Christendom observes Sunday, but some observe Saturday – Seventh Day Adventists and some Messianic congregations. Some opine heavily against beverage alcohol, while others accept wine, etc. as a blessing from God. When Paul stated his opinion that if you came to the Lord single, you should stay single, he made it clear that it was his opinion, not a command from the Lord.

So what about all of these various and contrary opinions? Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit, told us that it was fine for the brethren to be fully convinced in different ways since/because/if we are living for God – Rom. 14:5-6. Yet, in the next chapter [15:5-6] he instructs and encourages us to be like-minded [or same-minded]. Notice that his topic there has to do with pleasing the Lord and our brothers by living the spirit of acceptance of one another. In Philippians 2:3-4 he supplied us with a clue to how that may be done – regarding others as more important than ourselves.

8. Here is an important little Thought to consider for the remainder of our earth life. We who are in Christ are the righteousness of God. For that word in 2 Corinthians 2:21 to have any effect in our lives, we must understand that it a) does not tell Christians to try to attain to greater righteousness so we can become righteous like is God, and b) does tell us that Christians are already the righteousness of God.

 If that leaves you stymied, recall that we are called to live by faith, meaning here that when the Spirit of Christ entered into us He became our righteousness and He Himself functionally lives out His righteousness. We are free from sin-bondage and empowered by Him within to display Him. That happens by faith, not by our determination. Yes, we commit sins, but the faithful Christian repents and reminds himself that he had no business cavorting with the flesh; that he is the righteousness of God just as God’s righteousness is in Christ.

We start our born-again life by faith and live it the same way – Gal. 3:1-14. “.. with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness .. [whether for our initial salvation of the reception of Christ’s spirit, or for daily growth in manifesting His righteousness] – Rom 10:10.

9. It might accurately be said that there are two parts to our relationship with the Lord: personal and service. For harmony with Him and cooperation with His plans He has devised a great tool – prayer. Prayer is designed to prevent our doing our own thing, through His and our flow of openness and intimacy.

He is tangible and conversive, but invisible and silent to our earthly senses. When we begin to lose our spiritual sensitivity we begin to depend upon our natural senses, becoming religious. Our agendas begin to diverge from His agenda and become too small, narrow and constricted. We lose the big picture. Returning to Him with all our hearts restores the functionality of our relationship.

Someone other than only myself needed to hear that Thought.

10. What do you think about collecting your rewards here on earth, without waiting until you get to heaven? Remember that there are positive and negative rewards – blessings and curses. Again, where do you want to collect your rewards?

Jesus told us of some who would receive their rewards while here on earth in this earth-life – Matt. 6:2, 5, 16. Paul told the church to reward certain ones who labored among them – 1 Tim. 5:17-18. Other good and bad rewards are to be given in heaven – Matt. 5:12, 2 Pet. 2:9.

So, my question can be broken down this way: Would you like to receive your good rewards now? Part now and part in heaven? All in heaven?

Would you like to receive your bad rewards now? Part now and part in heaven? All in heaven?

What we prefer makes little or no difference. We will get them according to the Lord’s good will.

11. In Revelation 21:5 our Heavenly Father said: “Behold, I am making all things new. Write, for these words are faithful and true. It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.” [Notice that I left out all that was not part of that which He Himself said.]

First, if you are reading from a red letter translation you have noticed that those words are black, not red. That’s because, as I said above, they were spoken by our Father, not by Jesus. Our Father wants sons; Jesus wants brothers. Our Father can make sons; Jesus can make brothers.

Then, look at some of the things He said. 1) He is the Alpha and the Omega. That’s our Father, not Jesus. 2) Overcomers receive inheritances, which are more than the gift of being born into God’s family and going to heaven when they die. 3) In some way additional to our earth-life sonship, our Father will make sons of His overcomers.

Whatever the earth-life cost of becoming an overcomer, Rev. 21:1-4 is worth it. Esau sold out his birthright in the family, not his sonship. The Lord points out in Heb. 12:16-17 that Esau was rejected only for the family birthright inheritance. The sum of it is that we need to seek more than the gift, but also the inheritance.

12. How hard does one have to work to receive a revelation? Well, it takes a lot of hard work. And, it takes no work. In other words, it’s not related to work or trying, or even to one’s righteousness. It’s an act of God, as He reaches down and opens our eyes. He will do it; He alone can do it; I will venture to say that He delights in doing it. He does it for evil sinners in the midst of their sinfulness – Saul on the road to Damascus. He does it for saints in the midst of their being persecuted for righteousness – Stephen while being stoned, John on Patmos. He does it for saints who are in opposition to His ways – Peter in Joppa.

13. There is a vast difference between “the work of the Lord” and “the Lord of the work.” Mary was focused on the Lord of the work, while Martha focused on the work of the Lord. Both are important, but the Lord of the work is to have preeminence – “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her” – Luke 10:41-42.

When the Lord tells you to sit and be still, while He tells others around you to be up and active, the thing to do is sit and be still. If He tells you to come close to Him while your previous assignment teeters in jeopardy of failing, get close to Him. In fact, the work may indeed fall. Stay close to Him. If the work of your labors appears about to fall into the hands of another who would take it in another direction, stay in spiritual order -- stay close to Him.

14. There is considerable difference between moral truth and spiritual truth. The difference shows greatly in how we treat those wonderful Old Testament stories of God’s people, comparing ourselves to them. When we use the story of David and Goliath to illustrate bravery, that is teaching moral truth. When we use that story to teach dependence upon God in all of our circumstances no matter how great the odds, that is teaching spiritual truth. As a matter of fact, the point of David’s story is not that he was brave, but that he trusted God. He did not trust in anything of himself, even his bravery.

Would you rather your children be brave or be faithful when faced with life’s problems? Teach Light.

15. It’s mostly the process that we don’t like. Being a seed that goes into the ground is hard enough on the flesh, but surrendering to the long process of growth [drought, floods, heat, cold, wind] that leads to maturity and fruit-bearing seems to have no end. But that’s the plan. Absolutely essential to the believer is that the Lord is always with us.

While going through those 6 weeks of daily 20 minute radiation treatments on my neck and adjacent body [none of which in themselves were uncomfortable or painful], the rawness of my increasingly blistered neck was physically and emotionally distressing. Yet, there I lay on the table, voluntarily, day by day, even though I had only a 10% chance of having any remaining cancer after a second surgery that failed to find any further cancer. Willing submission to and cooperation with those more experienced with my condition – those who had my well-being in mind, had me thinking, “Lord, why am I doing this? The odds were already greatly in my favor. You could have handled this without using them.”

His word came to me, bringing understanding and peace, saying, “Look at what you have.” I think that would have been enough for the occasion, that the larger expanse of my entire body was intact, but then He added, “I have been through this before.” That was really good for my soul – very good. Since then I have reflected on how much better it was for me to hear Him say, “I have been through this before” than “Others have been through this before.” My light and brief ordeal was not to be compared to those of others, but to His being with me as He had been with the many thousands of others. He was no beginner; I was but He wasn’t.

I can’t say that I felt any better physically after that conversation, but my focus was better. And I was thankful.

16. In order to walk in the Spirit, we must be able to hear our Shepherd’s voice for ourselves and for others. That is beyond knowing His ways. That’s obvious in both the Old Testament and New Testament. Jesus said His sheep would hear His voice. That is a precious offer and is a clear call to sheephood by the Great Shepherd. Saul was drastically changed on the road to Damascus when he heard Jesus identify Himself. David was restored when he heard the Lord’s correction through Nathan. Peter and his ministry were changed when he heard the Lord tell him to go to a Gentile’s home. The list is long. We must be able to hear the Lord.

He speaks, but apparently the Laodicean church [that’s probably us] is not listening – Rev. 3:20. In those verses [19-22] Jesus shows Himself standing at the door of His church, speaking and knocking, wanting in. Have we heard Him? What is He saying?

17. Yesterday, 4-15-13, Boston was bombed by terrorists. That was Patriot Day in Boston, but was also the 65th anniversary of the birth of the modern nation of Israel. It is also remarkable that it was Israeli physicians who had trained the Boston medical teams to respond to this kind of mass-casualty terror event. Israel understands better than anyone that these bombings are attacks on freedom, the cornerstone of open, democratic societies.

I have not heard anyone mention the anniversary connection, but I suspect that it was an ingredient of the terrorists’ plan. [Later note: apparently not an ingredient.] That sort of people likes to do their work on special anniversaries. I look forward to the time when they will be properly celebrating the birth, resurrection and return of Jesus.

18. Let’s see how this Thought comes out: I was born with a human spirit that was powerless to resist sin. I was in bondage to sin. When I was tempted to do wrong, the only resource I had to resist sin was my religious/social/family training.

Jesus Christ died and was resurrected. We [believers] have now been placed in/immersed in/plunged into Him. That’s now where we are. That means that, since He has been buried and resurrected, we also have been buried with Him and raised to new life. That’s a statement of absolute truth meant to be understood and accepted only by faith.

So, since we, like Him, have experienced death we are now experiencing His resurrection life. That is made possible because our old selves/souls are dead and we are now alive only by the resurrected Spirit that we have been given. That does away with our old bondage to sin. Why? Because, obviously, anyone who dies is freed from everything, including sin. So, because I am now alive only by the [new, in me] Spirit of God, sin and death no longer master me. We are now free to live with/for/to God.

Hurray! I am free from sin and from having to sin, and free to live righteously and faithfully. Oops! But I still commit sins. I obey the fleshy desires that seem to overwhelm me. My best insight says that I now am free from having to yield to temptation, but that my problem now is that I choose to yield. It’s as if I present myself to sin to be tempted and fall.

Yep, that’s it; it’s because I want to do it. Can it be that now I am free to choose sin or righteousness and in every case I have the power to choose righteousness? In all of life, especially in times of temptation, can I present myself to the Lord as His redeemed one, alive from the dead, instead of presenting myself to sin as its past slave, and sin could not master me – even in my weakest times? WOW! In that case, I will offer myself to the Lord to be His righteous slave.

But, again, I still sin! I see that I still get some shameful benefit from choosing the old way, although I know that the outcome of those choices is “death” to me and others. My only solution: The Love of God, who freed me from sin and its bondage and strengthens me to live victoriously, now freely forgives, cleanses and restore me when I sin and repent. That’s more of His abundant and free gift that is wrapped up in that which He calls our eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If you have read Romans 6 lately, you recognized it as this Thought. Add to it 1 John 5:4.

19. Lin Yutang [1895-1976] was a Chinese writer, translator, linguist and inventor. He had what sounds like a wise oriental approach to life and work: “Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is the noble art of leaving things undone. The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of non-essentials.” That sounds so good that I’m working on getting some Scripture backup for it.

Yutang [his first name] was born into a Christian minister’s family in China. He was raised Christian, then wandered about in religion through Taoism and Buddhism, and back to Christianity. He chronicled his journey of faith in a book, *From Pagan to Christian* [1959]. He invented the Chinese typewriter [thought to be an impossible task], a toothbrush that dispenses toothpaste, and wrote extensively in Chinese and English.

Wisely choose which things to leave undone, perhaps until tomorrow, perhaps to never be done. Jesus delayed going to Lazarus, who died because of the delay, but He raised him from the dead. Jonah tried to avoid Nineveh, but encountered more than he could resist. King Saul put off the total annihilation of the Amalekites, and lost his kingship. Be careful and wise about leaving things undone or putting off anything.

20. Faith always causes us to lose control of something, usually our selves, at lease a bit. That’s necessary in order for the occasion to be of faith. When we have lost control of ourselves often enough in the way of faith, we have developed a way of life that pleases God, scares many [even saints], and displays reality. Jesus was the perfect example of that life.

Soren Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher and writer, appears to have had a natural grasp on faith when he wrote: “To dare is to lose one’s footing momentarily. To not dare is to lose oneself.”

21. There is great joy in befriending the down-trodden, the reprobate, those committed to lives of sin. If they are fallen Christians who are still committed to living in sin, becoming friends with them is a definite boost to my joy – Gal. 6:1; Jam. 5:19-20. If they are unbelievers to whom the Lord gives grace for fellowship, I find a special friendship with them – perhaps a gift. I suppose it can be compared to the Lord calling His disciples “friends” because as-yet they were unbelievers who had only received God’s grace to have life-producing fellowship with Him. After they were born again they became His and our brothers. I remember that the news for myself was sooooo good. It was no great problem that I could not go back and start a new beginning, because I started that day with a new life which had a new ending.

So, why not pursue the down-trodden, the reprobate, those committed to lives of sin? Jesus went to their houses, ate from their tables, and accepted them into open fellowship. He was even known for His frequent association with those with whom he kept fellowship – the tax gatherers and other sinners. It could be that we like our current reputation more than we like Jesus’ reputation[?] – Matt. 9:11; 11:19.

22. There are some easy observations and conclusions in life including those to be made while reading the gospels, even if one is not highly opinionated. One is that the more religious those Bible characters were, the less likely they were to recognize and appreciate who Jesus was. Another is that sinners had little difficulty recognizing Him.

Sinners recognized a friend when they saw one. The religious saw a man who was a threat to their religious ideas, positions, connections and ministries.

23. This is only for those who love God’s word, including loving the Bible, as shown by their consistent exaltation of His word over themselves. The Lord exalts His word over all else of Himself [Ps. 138:2(b) KJV]. Therefore, because He submits Himself to whatever He has said, so also should we. If His word has that place over our lives, that is living evidence of our love for Him. It is evidence that we are living for Him, not for ourselves – 2 Cor. 5:15.

Now the Thought. Jesus, the Living Word of God, the One who authored Scripture and spoke by the prophets, did some things with His written word during His 3 years of ministry that really bothered the religious leaders, who were literalists. They would have said, in this Thought: “The problem is that we love and exalt God’s word, but this Jesus both contracts and expands it beyond and contrary to its literality and accuracy.” They were literalists; Jesus was not. How was that, we may ask.

Jesus told the literalists that they were murders if they hated someone and that they were adulterers if they looked at a woman and lusted for her. Literalist had drawn the line at the physical acts of murder and adultery, but Jesus moved the line to include the mental act of hate and lust. That’s what I meant when I said that He “expanded” the written word [actually, showing how it should have been understood in the first place.]

Then, when they brought to Him a woman caught in the act of adultery, He did not fulfill the written word in regards to her. The written word said she was to be stoned to death. He Himself had inspired/written that very command during His pre-incarnate existence. And He, the Author, said on the spot that he who was without sin should obey the Scriptures and throw the first stone. He was present and perfectly qualified to throw that stone. Yet, He did not condemn her nor stone her. Thus, He “contracted” or “diminished” or “narrowed” or “reduced” the word of God. The literalists were confounded and angered at the way He “mishandled” God’s Law.

Going back to the first paragraph, this Thought is only for those who love God’s word; those who do not want to change it, and who do not try to hide from its authority, power and clarity. Those are the ones whom the Lord can trust with accurate, graceful revelation, enabling them to contract and expand His word to its more full understanding and fullest use. Here Jesus was/is again our example, perhaps in an unexpected way. Get close to Him. Good things will happen to and through us.

When the Lord sends us forth on a project, such as to teach this 23rd Thought, He selects someone who not only knows the facts and how to do the work, but who also feels like He does about the project [always meaning “people”]. He would not send one who was only a literalist. If we are intimate with the Lord we know that He is guided by how He feels about someone. That guidance is commonly accomplished by His insight into the sinner’s heart.

24. Today I read a little article by David Wilkerson [1931-2011]. In it he said he believed that the two most absolute things about God are, 1] He loves us no matter our condition and 2] it is our faith that most pleases Him. I can think of several other great things, among them love and righteousness, but I’m not confident ranking any of them. Probably that which we would rank highest on any particular day is the thing that we need right now, or have most recently received.

25. Can we learn truths without knowing the truth in any topic: science, religion, finances, military strategy, etc.? Yes, I think we can. It’s something that teachers must be careful of, that of teaching truths without the students grasping the whole/integrated picture.

Paul wrote to Timothy [2 Timothy 3:7] that there is a danger in continually learning facts without ever coming to the knowledge of the truth. Paul certainly knew from experience the danger of learning loads of facts about God without ever knowing Him, or without continually growing in the knowledge of Him.

If that happens, we can know much about God and His ways but have an attitude problem or spiritual personality quirk or “different spirit.” Gaining an abundance of knowledge about God can change us for the worse, such as by making us arrogant – 1 Cor. 8:1-3. But knowing the Lord and growing in our knowledge of Him makes us more graceful – full of grace for others, not only for ourselves – 2 Pet. 3:18.

Besides all of that, is it possible that the knowledge of Jesus, initially and continually, comes by revelation, not by study/information? Selah.

26. One of Jesus’ earlier examples of having strength of character was that He was unhurried. He refused to be pressed into hurriedness. I suspect that His disciples were impressed by that trait, until it went beyond their understanding and appreciation. His strength of character came from long-practiced faith; their level of faith was yet dominated by their situations.

When they heard that Lazarus was near death, their limited faith would have propelled them into Bethany double time. Jesus, who had the same character-producing Spirit that we now have, waited a couple of days before leaving for Lazarus’ bedside. You know the story. Lazarus had been dead for 3 days when they arrived so Jesus raised him from the grave.

Lord Chesterfield [1694-1773], British statesman, known for his courtly manners and long, distinguished service in Britain’s public and foreign affairs, had much to say about civility. In regards to hurriedness he said: “Whoever is in a hurry shows that the thing he is about is too big for him.” I think Jesus’ actions support Lord Chesterfield’s statement.

27. Each born again Christian could make a nice list of reasons why the Lord Jesus died for us, for each and every one of us. One reason is given in 2 Corinthians 5:15: “… and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.” As I think about that, the Spirit within draws me to honest self-evaluation.

Not everything I do is for me, and not everything I do for me is “not for Christ Jesus.” But much of that which I do is simply for me – good things, but for my benefit and enjoyment. Perhaps one has to be a bit of a fanatic [being a disciple will be sufficient] to realize that good things done are not necessarily of and for the Lord. If we see our deficiency in that area, He draws us onward toward our upward call in Christ Jesus. There is no condemnation for being where we are, and there is no end to the extent of that upward call.

28. Among the signers of the Declaration of Independence, there was only one Catholic, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, Maryland. Why only one? Even though America was founded by Europeans who sought freedom from religious persecution, Catholics in the original thirteen American colonies were denied the right to educate their children, could not attend Mass in a church building, and were forced to pay double taxes. In view of that, it is remarkable that Maryland’s voters thought enough of his integrity to send him to the Constitutional Convention.

Carroll was the last living signatory of the Declaration, and lived long enough to be interviewed by Alexis de Tocqueville, who said of him, “this race of men is disappearing after having provided America with her greatest spirits.” He died in 1832 at age 95.

29. Until next month I’ll leave you with this Thought: “A house divided against itself cannot stand” and “Love your neighbor as yourself” are not simple thoughts. They are absolutes, they are commands, they are meant to be bedrock and functional in the life of the church – each one of us, each congregation of us, each denomination of us.

Christians, it is fine that we must meet in different buildings, there being no one building that can host all of Christianity at one time. It is fine that we have different labels on our buildings, showing that we have particularly close fellowship and cooperation with certain others. It is fine that we believe differently in many parts of our theology, showing that we have a God who has a mind that even spiritually enlightened believers cannot grasp. It is not fine when we allow anything to separate us from loving one another and from functioning together in the love of Christ. And it is not fine when we are satisfied with our current divided-house and neighbor-loving status quo.

Let’s ask the Lord what we are to do about it.

30. Today is Palm Sunday, the day Christians celebrate Jesus Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He was rightly being hailed as Israel’s king, the long-prophesied one who was spoken of for centuries. There are some remarkable things for us to enjoy.

Number one is that Jesus had been telling everyone [disciples and others] to keep quiet about His identity and miraculous works. But on this occasion He openly encouraged and received the peoples’ praises that were usually reserved for kings. They were acknowledging Him to be the fulfillment of Zechariah’s [9:9] prophesy, which surely He was. Zechariah spoke those words almost 500 years before Jesus fulfilled them.

Number two is that at about the same time as Zechariah, the Lord revealed to Daniel [9:24-27] the exact day that Jesus would ride into Jerusalem on that donkey. This very specific prediction begins in verse 25, saying that the interval between the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem until the presentation of the Messiah as king would be 173,880 days. The king of Babylon issued that order on March 14, 445 BC and Jesus made His entrance on April 6, 32 AD, exactly 173,880 days later.

Archeology, computers and Bible make for some great studies of history.

31.