THOUGHTS OF MAY, 2016

1. God’s grace abounds. Believers in Christ Jesus are accustomed to grace, but unbelievers get their share, too. Not only do they receive grace that comes to them through the effects of believers’ presence and good deeds, but they get credit before God [are justified] for their righteousness as they respond according to the revelation of Himself in creation, and live godly lives according to their revelation. Their consciences and actions show their acceptance of God and His ways. Such will be adequate for them in the judgment – Romans 2:12-16. [That assurance does leave me with unanswered questions but our just God has all bases covered. Like the eternal future of babies who die, God is good.]

How did they come about the knowledge of God and His ways? They noticed that God’s invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, were clearly revealed all around them in His creation. Any creator’s handiwork reveals essentials about the creator, so the Master’s handiwork reveals the Master, not only that He exists but His character and other things of His essence. That observation and insight, with proper actions that follow, are necessary for grace in this earthlife and thereafter – Romans 1:18-20. I don’t know much other than that, but I know that because God is revealed by creation and by His written word.

By the way; grace is a person, the man Jesus Christ. Read verses on grace inserting “Jesus” in place of “grace” and be blessed.

2. Establishing order is difficult for the chaotic but easy for the orderly. It seems to me that orderliness is the simplest righteous act that humans can do. Unbelievers of all sorts establish order, and function well within their order. Of course, some established orders are terrible and lead to shambles, but even a little good order is effective.

God is a Person of perfect order, so it is easy for Him to establish order. Within Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit He has order, not only different identities and division of labors. Wherever Jesus went He established order and pronounced peace [sometimes peace, then order] which resulted in cooperation, coordination, productivity, peace, security and Life.

From the beginning there was order between God and His creation as like begat like and got along among themselves. Those first 5 days showed that the Creator was orderly, cooperative, coordinated, productive, peaceful, secure, and Life-giving. After each day’s work He said his handiwork was “good.” After creating Adam and Eve, and putting them among the first-produced of His creation, He said, “This is very good.” He didn’t say “perfect,” but “very good.” All was well-made and well-coordinated.

So, in the beginning the earth enjoyed heavenly order. God’s earthly kingdom was like His heavenly kingdom – orderly, cooperative, coordinated, productive, peaceful, secure, and Life-giving. That meant that the Son [who became Jesus Christ] was in His right place in Adam’s and Eve’s lives, and that Adam and Eve were relating to one another likewise. It meant that the plants and animals and humans functioned in heavenly order. As long as the Son had preeminence, all was well.

Nothing has changed. As long as Jesus has the preeminence in and among us, all is well. That is one thing that sets the church apart from the world. It is part of our light displayed from the hilltop.

3. One example in Scripture of the Lord doing something is not sufficient for establishing a firm theological statement on the matter, but it is meant to get our attention. In Acts 16:6-7 the Holy Spirit, who had been leading Paul on his journey, forbid his going into Bithynia and led him elsewhere. That does not mean that Christians should never go to Bithynia, but does show that the Lord will clearly lead us in our lives and service to Him, and that He can fix our souls so we can perceive that leading. That means in work, education, missions, and all else. Need gets our attention but the Holy Spirit and the Spirit-led life are not directed only by need. Paul learned that as he continued his missionary journey.

4. Is it enough to deal with the devil when working to rid yourself of a problem? We have heard that our broader problem-causers are 1) the world [the pressure of others], 2) the flesh [the self, the old sin nature in me], and 3) the devil [an evil, actual person]. The world’s power over us is handled by our making a full-life commitment to the Lord, then engaging the faith-walk process. The flesh’s power over us is handled by first being born again, then engaging the faith-walk process. The devil’s power over us can then be handled by resisting him in the name and power of Jesus, and he will flee from us. That’s simplistic but true.

Consider the situation of humans during the millennium, when there will be common-bodied humans on earth and there will be humans in their glorified bodies [who had died the earth death or been raptured before they died]. Jesus, who will be on His throne in Jerusalem ruling over the world, will be among the latter group. At the beginning of that 1,000 years some important things relating to this Thought will happen, and will continue for the entire 1,000 years. 1) The world’s power over humanity will gradually diminish because nations and individuals will get increased pressure to be righteous. Unrighteousness will have immediate or soon consequences, and will gradually conform to righteous principles. 2) The flesh’s power over the common-bodied humans, even if not born again, will suffer the same pressure as will the world’s powers, plus they will have significantly righteous peer pressure and help from the glorified humans. 3) The devil’s pressure will be non-existent. At the beginning of the millennium he will be locked away from the earth in a pit. So the earth will be a place of increasing peace, order, and godliness of humanity [and probably of animals and nature].

But, at the end of the 1,000 years the devil will be released from his pit and allowed to resume his work on earth for a short time before he is locked away permanently. During his brief time of release he will cause major problems among humanity and creation. In that many will follow him we can see the weakness of unregenerate human and societal goodness – the good folks who conformed to righteousness but did not have God’s Holy Spirit will fall for the thinking and ways of the devil. He will form an army of evil that will be defeated by Jesus Himself, again showing that it is not by anything of humanity but only by the Lord that righteousness can reign.

So back to our first question: Is it enough to deal with the devil when working to rid yourself of a problem? The answer is “now No” and “ultimately No.” If the devil were to disappear today the problems of peer pressure and self would still be with us. The deep problem within every man, woman and child would still remain. A good or Christianized society and family does have a good effect on us, giving us good peer pressure but each of us needs to be born again. God Himself within us by His Spirit gives us His righteousness and starts us on the road of living out His righteousness.

5. Jesus came as the Christ to form a body. He completed His assignment. The Christian organization known as the church is that body so it is rightly called “The Body of Christ.” But He did not come to simply give His corporate believers a title for their group-identity. That title is meant also to be a description of those believers. The Body of Christ is meant to display Christ in bodily form. Really! It does greater things than He did; it breaks down the gates of hell, and it is the fullness of Christ in every aspect. That’s what the Holy Spirit said through Jesus and through Paul. It’s the truth. It happens.

6. We often need help with personal insightfulness. It may not have been an entirely righteous question, or at least not come from an entirely righteous questioner, when Jesus was asked, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus’ answer came easily and quickly because the carpenter from Nazareth was coming alive to the truth and was becoming aware that He was the Truth Himself. His answer: “You will not know who your neighbor is until you are neighborly.” See Luke 10:25-37.

The same goes for the question, “Who is my mother [father, brother, sister, son, daughter, and family – ed.] – Matt. 12:46-50? As before, the answer would read, “You won’t know until you are family.” No one needs to have described to them how diligently our flesh puts our natural family ahead of our spiritual family, and even ahead of God’s calling on our lives when we sense our call away from them. Our sense of family with our natural family is so good and strong and biblical that it can squeeze out our overriding sense of spiritual family.

It’s encouraging to us who have worked through some of that squeeze to know that one of those natural [half] brothers [James] whom Jesus “rejected” in favor of those who were [at that time] more doing the will of God [Matthew 12:46-50] turned out in a few years to be the leader of the church in Jerusalem. When we walk in the Spirit following the Lord we are called to make hard [on the flesh] decisions, some of which only the Redeemer can redeem. He is a good, complete, and miraculous redeemer, if we will walk with Him. If we hold back, ….

7. I think that you, being like me, would rather the Lord deliver you from your weaknesses [make you strong] and trials [avoid them] than you go through life’s battles in your weaknesses and trials with the Lord “having to” encourage and rescue you in them. Probably the three Israelites who went into and through and out of the fiery furnace would rather not have gone in, than be rescued in – but afterwards they knew that the Lord’s way was vastly superior to their preferred way.

Paul learned to take pleasure in his weaknesses and trials, but I’m assured that he did not intentionally keep his weaknesses and develop his own trials – 2 Cor. 12:10. He was weak; he did not make himself weak. He had trials; he did not arrange his trials. But he did not fight against having trials that exposed his weaknesses. He did not doubt the sufficiency of God’s grace for whatever his situation. That meant that he knew the Lord could bring him through everything but also meant he was ready to die in anything. That’s also how ready the three Israelites were – Dan. 3:16-18. Their recorded experience was very expensive to them, like they paid our tuition – Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11.

8. This is an interesting Thought: The Holy Spirit does not lead immature believers, only mature believers [by definition]. Immature believers are led by the flesh. That Thought can go in several directions. The Holy Spirit is working to mature us, to “lead us into all righteousness.” So He is working from day one of our rebirth to fix our hearts and minds and spiritual ears so we will recognize His voice and follow Him. John 1:12 says that those who receive Jesus are given the right to become baby sons of God through their faith. Romans 8:14 says that all who are being actively led by the Spirit of God are mature sons of God. The Holy Spirit feeds us milk [nourishes us crying cradle-huggers] and changes our diapers [deals with our sinfulness], while protecting and tutoring us into maturity. Then we can hear and honor His words, live by faith, trust Him in and through our weaknesses and trials, and be like Jesus in all ways.

9. The Lord put His church in the world in the midst of all sorts of unrighteousness, all of which were common to us before we were redeemed. Now we are washed, and get re-washed as is necessary and requested. It has been said that ships sink only because the water around them gets inside. That same process goes on with the church. It is unnecessary to sink, although some bilge water is inevitable. Yet, the Head of the church has paid a high and adequate price for establishing [needed only once] and restoring [needed often] our purity. He is wonderful and full of glory.

10. Modern folk find it difficult to think of America as an illiterate nation. In the early days of our nation illiteracy was fairly common, but literacy was always being worked on from village to village and from home to home. Schools followed closely on the heels of blacksmith shops and saloons as marks of civilization.

The illiteracy problem produced by our public schools [school teachers are not the only culprits in illiteracy] is not the only illiteracy problem we have. Biblical illiteracy among modern Christians is produced right here in our churches. Yes, churches are the culprits in this illiteracy. That means me and you. In much of the world, possession of a Bible can lead to a death sentence. In America we are free to have and read our Bibles, but do not. There is an attitude in the churches that Bible reading and study are not necessary. It says: “The Bible seems irrelevant. Life is busy. Lots of things are going on. We are going and coming. Who has time or the motivation to read a book that was written thousands of years ago and is difficult to understand? And why worry about religion? I can get along without that old fashioned stuff.”

There is nothing new in those thoughts. What may be new is the rapid withdrawal from biblical reality that is going on in formerly-Christian nations, including America. It is a set-up for one of the main signs of the end of this age and the soon-return of Jesus Christ – deception. Deception is not only not new, but it is the oldest weakness around. In the garden, Eve was first to hear the whisper, “Now Eve, did God really say it that way?” So she questioned God’s word and allowed a twist of the truth to suit her personal desires. It looked so easy for her to accept a clear misinterpretation of the truth.

Deception develops in the two vacuums of simple ignorance and of misinformation – making up something and misquoting. Simple ignorance is a mark of the unchurched, and misinformation is a mark of the inadequately churched. It seems that Scripture mostly addresses the inadequately informed churched in this matter, and that is where I will comment.

Translation of the Bible into the common language some 500 years ago, and its mass distribution due to the printing press, opened the way for a mass move of God that changed the flow of history. A Bible-based and faith-filled church increased in size and power. Those printed words in believers’ hands were brought to life by the Holy Spirit and wave after wave of revivals followed. Today those revivals are mostly and abundantly moving in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The church in those continents is growing while the church in North America, Europe, and Australia is shrinking.

In the shrinking churches of these nations, many pews have Bibles, and Scripture is read regularly from the pulpit. Yet, the attendees have little or no desire to study those Bibles. Those words are no longer “love letters from God to me,” or “life-giving words that warm and direct my soul.” Bible classes are non-existent or few in number and are poorly attended. Good books are more often studied in some church groups than is the Bible. No wonder the church accepts sin that is condemned in Scripture, and even labels it as normal and righteous, while persecuting those who hold up biblical standards for correction and direction.

Our current deceptions are shown by our “acceptance” and “not judging.” Everything Jesus did and said was grounded on Scripture. He said the word of God stands forever and that He never changes. He called us to live according to His word. Scripture confirms or corrects all of life, beliefs, and opinions. Without Scripture we become personally opinionated and elevate our opinions above God’s, and don’t care. Being biblically ignorant sets us up for deception. Like truth is a person [Jesus]; so is deception a person [Satan]. If the difference between Jesus and Satan is important to you, do something about it. Get a Bible, start reading it, join or start a Bible Study group, etc. Your time is short.

11. Fasting gives us more spiritual authority over the natural. It is a voluntary putting aside of the demands of our flesh, a not-so-simple “taking charge” of our appetites, a display to the devil that we are faithfully serious about walking in the Spirit. It is other things, too. Fasting is a part of a life lived in obedience to the Lord. He Himself fasted! He had to fast because there were some spiritual battles He would have lost if He had not fasted. Just enter into conversation with yourself and/or others about having a fast, and see the spiritual battle that promptly begins.

Fasting is an important part of our walk if we are Christ-centered, Spirit-led, and Scripture-based.

12. A pleasant, thought-provoking little Thought: If you were going to leave town, under which circumstances would you prefer to go? [“Whatever God wants” doesn’t fit the question.] Here’s your list to choose from: Acts 7:54-60; 8:1; 12:1-2; 13:1-4; 13:48-52; 15:31-33. My old man would quickly choose the last, while my new man would choose the first.

13. Now is the time for our Evangelicals to come to the front in Corpus Christi, and elsewhere. The work the Lord is doing here started with Him stirring and gathering the Pentecostals/Charismatics. Over the past several years He has been bringing Evangelicals into close fellowship and leadership with the beginning group. Walls are coming down.

The history of the church, especially over the past 500 years [since the Bible has been in our hands and in our native language] is that the Lord has poured out of Himself [His Holy Spirit] on the church regularly. Each outpouring has had its special and lasting effect and message, but our flesh has isolated those messages and groups into new denominations.

As the time of the end approaches more closely, the years of division of the saints, and division of the messages into supposedly opposing doctrines, is coming to an end. That long-awaited church of Ephesians 4 is beginning to form. That unity has been yearned for by millions of saints, and worked for, but now the Lord Himself is doing it by His Spirit. Of course! Who would have thought it could come about any other way? [But we tried.]

14. In the early years of my spiritual walk, that beginning being 53 years ago, I noticed that in Scripture [Matthew 7:21-23] and by my own experience, that spirituality could outpace one’s righteousness. Knowing the weakness of my soul, that sent a shiver through me, and still does. I told the Lord that if my spirituality began to outgrow my righteousness, please correct it. If necessary, hinder my spirituality until my righteousness caught up. I have gone through many years with that prayer active among other prayers, and being able to see the Lord answering it. I don’t want to puff-up my righteousness, but I have been seeing a growth of my spirituality.

Edmund Burke said it well: “Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without.” That is as true in the natural as it is in the kingdom of God.

15. The marketplace is a place of fellowship. In shops and industries fellowship is the norm, the necessity, the product of being together for common purpose. That’s no surprise, is it? We were created in the image of an imaginative, creative, and productive God. The application of ourselves to work and service are meant to extend well beyond our immediate and personal self-interests.

Work is not just toil; it involves our lives and concerns our families and neighbors of all sorts. So, the workplace is a huge mass of relationships, which any successful person can tell you. The fruit of our work and any aspect of our creativity are not only dollars, but relationships, which forms community.

16. When Nancy and I started our walk with the Lord in 1964 the Lord gifted us with a wise and godly Bible Teacher. One of the things he told us in those first few months is that if we thought our lives with the Lord were going to be boring, we were wrong. As he said, just the opposite has been true. Life has been bigger and more wonderful than we could have dreamed, and there is no indication of a change. Jesus said He came to give us abundant life [a word which, to me, does not adequately explain its wonder and excitement]. And yet, there are those who look at our lives and do not see, who taste at the edge and stay only at the edge, who hear the wonders of the Lord among us and briefly only tingle. On the other hand, there are those who get only a faint glimpse and dive in. I was one who dove in, and have not been disappointed. Needless to say, my walk has not been perfect, but the fruit keeps bearing, sometimes even abundantly – John 10:10.

17. When times and situations are going good for a couple of generations, our understanding of what is “good times” becomes that which we have experienced. When times and situations are going bad for a couple of generations, our understanding of what is “bad times” becomes that which we have experienced. When that’s the way we evaluate things, it means that we are using the wrong basic measuring rod. The correct measuring rod is the Lord and His word as applied by the Holy Spirit. When we compare how we are doing with each other, whether contemporaries or ancestors, we are carnal and shallow.

Remembering that, I will risk saying that I hear and see that we are living in a time of spiritual decline. That is an observation from my 86 years and that of historians within and without the church. It certainly shows to be true from the New Testament record, although there is nothing new in our world or our kingdom. It is a measurement of how much, not of newness. I’m speaking principally of the church, Jesus’ beloved bride, for whom He died, and upon whom He lavished gifts that are designed to beautify us before the world and for our coming marriage.

In the church, the general state of unbelief and ignorance is rampant, compared to biblical Christianity as seen in Scripture and from time to time and place to place over these 2,000 years. Some preachers are preaching directly contrary to biblical clarity. Some church leaders are essentially atheists – not knowing and not caring what God has said and brought to us in our common print. As always, this is a spiritual matter, beginning in our case with Satan knowing that his time is short. It is not a surprise that the world is deceived, but it still surprises me when I see life-long churched people being simply deceived and neither caring nor understanding when shown God’s simple truth.

And it is not a matter of that old time warfare between Christian denominations. It’s a matter of warfare between Satan and that part of the church that does not care for Jesus and His words. Those who exalt the Lord and His word above all of themselves [as does God – Ps. 138:2] are at peaceful rest in Him, sheltered under His wing, trusting in His faithfulness, and are not disappointed.

That is not meant to say that there is no tribulation among the faithful. In fact, those who even desire to live godly in Christ do suffer conflict and persecution, but they follow a different script, and it shows. For us of the Western Church, we are engaged in cultural battles. We have our usual struggles with finances, marriage, and the gamete of temptations so we do not have a casual walk, but the foundations of our faith make us secure during our trials. If we abandon basics [gathering ourselves together, anointed leadership, keeping our brothers, the cross-walk, speaking the truth in love, etc.] we can falter and lose battles.

“Keeping rank” is a powerful offensive and defensive strategy. It helps us avoid compromising what we already believe and what the Lord says afresh. We can stand in tough times when we stand together – even stand against every onslaught of the devil.

18. When someone speaks up for the poor, the sick, the homeless, etc. have you noticed that you engage your “compassion filter?” That filter says, “When I heard Mother Teresa speak of the needy I was persuaded. When this person speaks of the same, I turn him off.” The basis for listening or turning off is based not on compassion for the poor, or on what they are saying, but on the living truth vs. hypocrisy in the speaker. I take that to heart. When giving a talk, if I don’t have a relevant testimony to insert, I have nothing to say unless I first confess my lack.

19. From our beginnings we have been body, soul, and spirit. Body is our physical [mechanical, chemical] body. Soul is our mind, will, emotions, intellect, emotions, feelings. Spirit is that which gives life to our body and soul. We start life with a human spirit, which not only gives us life, but enables us to respond as spiritual beings to spiritual beings, whether we know or believe in spiritual things or not. Our human spirit is weak in that it is subject to spiritual leadership and control even when we would rather not be subject.

There are two spiritual beings, both with their underlings. Those two beings are the Lord God and Satan. Since humans are naturally self-centered, our human spirit commonly selects Satan’s leadership. From our natural human birth we are self-centered, which is not necessarily grossly evil. At that time we have only our human nature with which we must engage the world around us. When we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we are born again from above – our second birth. God puts of Himself in us, His Holy Spirit, and removes our human spirit.

If that exchange of spirits was not instantaneous, we would have fallen down dead during the interval because we must have a spirit to be alive in our human bodies. We are then alive only by God’s Spirit in us. We are free from having to be subject to Satan. We have a new identity as God’s child, are granted fellowship with Him and the remainder of His family, and have all rights and privileges as has Jesus, our Elder Brother who earned all of this for us.

Our problem then is that our soul had been trained to be like Satan. As we walk in fellowship with God and His family, our soul is re-patterned after the likeness of Jesus, and un-patterned from the likeness of Satan. That wonderful process continues for the remainder of our earth-life. That which is called “the flesh” is that old pattern of self-centeredness that remains in our soul, which by God’s grace diminishes or dies daily.

From that basis, Paul wrote Romans 7:18 and surrounding verses. He had no difficulty dividing between all of the above because His soul had been well [but incompletely] re-patterned after the Spirit – Hebrews 4:12. If we continue living and doing non-Spirit-led lives and things, at best we are doing “nothing” – although we are equipped to do “SOMETHING!” – John 15:5.

20. Here is a little touch of encouragement to those of us who are already squatted down, ready to leap up into the rapture. There being no coincidences or accidents in the kingdom, it was right on God’s schedule for the Dead Sea Scrolls to be acquired by a Hebrew University professor within days of the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan which paved the way for the [re-]creation of the nation Israel in its promised land on planet Earth. The Author of Scripture proved the authenticity of the Bible and His faithfulness to His word as spoken through the prophets at the same time. The scrolls matched our modern Bible texts, proving that the Bible had not been corrupted in any way.

21. Let’s try to read God’s mind, since we know Him, know His ways, know how He feels, and that He delights in hiding things so we will search for them, and find them. Question: Why did God choose that Land to give to His chosen people, Israel? We know that it was a perfect match, or He would not have made it. We have lots of clues. For one, the Promised Land was where His people were headed as soon as they learned to live by faith.

If you were told that you had to learn a certain thing before taking your next promotion at work, and that that thing was “living by faith in the invisible despite overwhelming natural evidence,” you might not accept the promotion. Well, many of the Israelites did not accept their offer and promotion, either. They were unfit for the next step in life, so they died off in the wilderness in their then-current job.

That Promised Land was a land they could possess/live in only if they entered it with a high level of confidence in and obedience to their invisible, All-Mighty God. It had milk and honey but they had to fight giants, armies, and walled cities that were impossibilities without deep faith and obedience. Drought and famine were recurrent. In short, they would die unless they occupied the Land on God’s terms. As you know, sometimes they did and sometimes they did not.

Therein we see ourselves, and benefit – Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11. Then, as now, faith and obedience are required to obtain the fullness of that which the Lord has prepared for His people – us. Alongside current Israel, we are deep into God’s miraculous redemptive process. We are part of the miracle.

22. I was born into Christian culture [family, nation, church] so I simply believed the religion that I was taught. Had I been born into Hindu culture I would have believed Hindu. Had I been born into Islam I would have believed Islam. As a child, I accepted the Bible and the church’s teachings as presented. I was a cultural Christian.

That could have continued for all my life, but when I was eleven years old the culture and those teachings were used by the Holy Spirit to introduce me to Jesus Christ and He became personal to me – as my Savior. I was born again, a forever son of God, headed for heaven when I died. As my years increased and my situations changed from farm boy to college student, family man, and workplace scrambler I easily fit into the life and practices of those around me. Without knowing it, I had accepted Jesus as my Savior but not as my Lord. Yes, I knew His rules of life but had no idea of such things as commitment or discipleship or the crosswalk. They may have been dangled before my eyes and been shouted into my ears, but if so they made no mark that I can now recall.

Then, when I was 34, I heard the living gospel through a friend, not as read from the Bible but as testimony of Jesus alive and doing what He had said He would do – powerful, body-healing, life changing things, now, today, in my friend and in others. That’s when I gave my life to Him who had given His life to me when I was eleven. That’s when I died to myself and came alive to Him. When I learned that He was serious and capable about an exchange of His and my lives from the inside out as an entire way to be and live, I accepted His offer. Then, by faith being dead to myself, He was able to make me as He wanted me to be, and to do with me what He wanted to do.

To those who know me personally; yes, it is a process still in the works.

23. Jesus told His disciples that he had many things to say to them, but that they could not bear hearing them at that time. Their response to that statement is not recorded, but their minds were no different from ours. Do you think that He later told them all that He knew? No – John 16:12-15. He left that job for the Holy Spirit to finish. But, has the Holy Spirit told us everything? Has He guided us “into all the truth?” Has He told us everything pertaining to us personally? What remains for Him to tell us this evening, next week, or next year? Have you given thought to why He has not already told you that which He will tell you tomorrow – Proverb 25:2? Is His information based simply on our need to know? How about wondering why He has told you things that He has not told your peers? Is this even an interesting thought?

24. That which we have received from those who went before us was handed to us as if on a silver platter, and we did receive a lot: freedom, bounty in medical care and food, finances and possessions, family “name” [character, reputation, order, and identity], and spiritual access with variable motivation for pursuing that Life.

Not too many years ago there was a thrust in American Christianity toward how to study the Bible. Many good translations and paraphrases and study Bibles were published, and they are still available. We pondered over which one was best. After awhile the best advice along that line was “the one you will read,” because reading the Bible had become something for occasions. That changed the question to “Why study the Bible?” As expected, biblical illiteracy followed biblical occasionality. That lukewarm generation is now being absorbed into our ambient secular culture. Instead of seeking to “live by every word of God” [Matthew 4:4], at best we seek verses that will shore us up emotionally according to our desires.

We have not been good stewards of the gifts of our ancestors. Take heart! The answer will be an act of God.

25. Our American Constitution guarantees us certain temporal freedoms, such as the freedom to own property and to have guns. The Constitution also guarantees us higher forms of property and power, they being of speech and religion. The Constitution would not have been worth much had it not protected our right to build now a dwelling for ourselves in those several dimensions.

26. A clue for the teacher and preacher is that the body of Christ cannot always be taught to, but must be first heard from. Watch its dynamics, the forces working, and the movement of God as volunteers all are dealt with by the Holy Spirit.

The body is not governed well by rules of “do this” or “don’t do that.” Follow what the flock is asking of God, what goals have been stirred in them by the Lord. Set down a few principles, like Jesus’ first and second commandments, things that their mothers probably taught them. More and bigger and longer rules tend to prevent growth and Life. God’s simple rules allow each person to organize their lives under them. That makes it easy for each to choose his own direction, especially in times of stress.

Good government of the Body of Christ can be sustained when the sustained heart’s desire of its members is to yield to our Master’s simple desires – love, bear our crosses, share, trust, and the like.

27. Jesus said, “A city set on a hill [actually, “on a mountain,” so we are very lifted up before the world] cannot be hidden; ..” That means we are being seen by the world whether we are doing good or bad. We are being seen. We are not invisible when our light is dim. We are seen when we are fighting and divided and being uncooperative, as when we are loving one another across old divisions and cooperating privately and publicly. We are seen as we are, no matter our condition. That can stir us to conviction and repentance and cleansing and restoration, as does the threatened loss of our testimony in Revelation 2:5. The Lord is a good shepherd.

28. We were dead dogs, road kill, miserable reprobates, [add your own pre-redeemed self-description] until God, being rich in mercy exercised His great love and made us alive together with Christ and raised us up like He raised up Jesus, and seated us [from the moment of our redemption until forever] with Jesus in the various heavenly places to come in the ages to come. That’s Ephesians 2:1-7. Rejoice with me as you allow the Holy Spirit to expand your biblically-directed imagination. We are there now and things only get better.

29. Recently it has been said that there is a lack of true, healthy, and necessary submission in society, in the church, within the ordained ministry itself, in the family, etc. It sounds like the spirit of iniquity [lawlessness] that has been spread abroad – Matt. 24:12; 2 Thess. 2:7. It may be that there is an equal lack of leadership. Submission among peer leaders is helpful to the youngers. In any case, there is a general need for righteous orderliness in all levels, isn’t there.

Civil authorities have been anointed by God to bring order by force as necessary – Rom. 13:1-7. Parents are likewise qualified – Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 26:3; 29:15. The Law was, and laws are, made because of and for the lawless, meaning those who live contrary to sound biblical teaching – 1 Tim. 1:8-10. Laws are good, as probably flashes through your mind when you hear of wrecks and loss of life from speeding automobiles – “They should have obeyed the speed limit.” Self-responsibility and living within limits are required, whether it’s driving cars, eating, enjoying beverage alcohol, sleeping, or other behavior.

Yet, there is a noticeable flesh response when someone is speaking of submission, chastisement, or forced conformity in an “over-the-hill,” declining society. In an emerging society, self-control, sacrifice, and discipline are more the norm. We can tend to unculturize ourselves out of righteous, reasonable living.

30. Paul said he received the gospel message directly from God, not through other Christians even though there were those about who were very qualified to share their first-hand testimony with others – Gal. 1:11-12. He said the same about his knowledge of the Lord’s Supper – 1 Cor. 11:23. John received revelations directly from the Lord, also – The Book of the Revelation chapters 1 through 22.

Moses received revelations, also. He is credited with writing the first five books of the Old Testament, about things which began long before he was born, so how did He know about the timing and actions of God in such as the creation as found in Genesis’ early chapters? That answer is probably found in Exodus 33:17-23 when God showed Moses all of Himself and His manifestations [His glory], except His face.

On the other hand, God inspired [breathed into souls] others to accurately know and write that which was “on His mind,” and spoke directly into the minds and/or ears of others. The Lord is a good communicator. He can fix our hearts and minds to hear and follow Him. He really is the Lord.

31. Take a pause to think about this Thought. Creation was made from things then seen only by God through His own faith and imagination, was materialized by being spoken into being by God, and that which was spoken into being [and that we now see] is yet made of invisible material. Hebrews 11:3 says that clearly. Check it out in several translations; don’t trust the paraphrases on this. Again; the things of our seen creation were made from things unseen [invisible] and are still made of things unseen [invisible]. That which we call the material, the seen and palpable, is still made of God’s invisible stuff that materialized [only when the invisible parts began to function properly in regards to God and one another] and is held in the material condition by His continual faith and direct will. That will change in God’s due time.

Atomic and subatomic particles are like the heavens – lots of space and little reality. In those particles the realities are electronic charges that can come and go, can apparently appear and apparently go away again, are invisible but show forth their nature. When humans disrupt their basic cohesiveness, dramatic power is loosened. Those “invisible somethings,” electronic charges, are meaningful for our present state of creation only when they are properly related to one another. That’s a miniscule picture of us in the kingdom.

32. The Prince of Peace has an unending supply of Himself. He gives peace [a form of His grace] to all who reach out to Him in faith; even a small bit of faith will do.

The evil one who would place us in bondage has laid some traps. He captures those who can be convinced that doing good things will fulfill God’s requirements. He certainly has logic on his side. His way exalts the person – “I can do it” – Ex. 19:8. Then, when only partly up one mountain, we find that there is always another mountain to climb before being self-perfected. It’s best to rely upon Jesus for the fulfillment of God’s requirements. That leads to peace, and peace leads to better performance – done then because we deeply appreciate His grace.

In the beginnings of each of Paul’s letters he greeted the churches with “grace and peace,” written in that order. God’s grace is the precursor of His peace. Peace is good soil in which the word of God can bear fruit.

33. The list of officially accepted books and letters in the New Testament was not agreed upon until400 A. D. in the western Mediterranean area, and not until 500 A. D. in the eastern. They were known to be “of God” from their beginnings but it took the church some time to get its act together and to come to the mind of Christ. There were lots of circumstances that the Holy Spirit had to develop and overcome, such as broad dissemination of the material, apostolic work among the variable societies, and church growth and purification through the persecutions. On God’s schedule it was done, and has stood the tests of time and divisiveness.

34. When Charles Spurgeon was asked if and how he would defend the gospel, he replied, “Yes, the way I would defend a lion. I just open the cage and let it out.”

35. Israel became a nation 68 years ago. It was not until 2013 that it became the largest Jewish populated nation in the world, at 6 million. Although it had become a nation in 1948, the Lord began returning Jews to the Land much earlier but in small amounts. They were important and endured lots of difficulties. Their Jewish population is now above 8 million, significantly more than the next most Jewish populated nation, that being the United States at 5.5 million.

Israel has wandered, been enslaved, enjoyed peace and power, lived in and out of the Promised Land, and generally been mistreated for thousands of years. That was the result of their disobedience to their God. But now God’s earthly people are being regathered, thanks to His faithfulness to His word and people. The process is picking up steam, especially from Europe where persecution is again increasing. There is a potential problem with them being in that one place in the world – it makes persecution and threatened eradication easier in the minds of their enemies.

Jesus gave us indicators for His end-time scenario. Get ready, saints. When the Lord says He will do something it often seems like a long time coming, then He does it in the blink of an eye.

36. The annual celebration of Pentecost, which marks the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church] will occur this year on June 11-13 on the Hebrew calendar. Again, be ready! What does “be ready” mean to you? Basic answer from Exodus 12:1-10: Be sure that the Lamb’s blood is on your lintel and doorposts (over all and to the left and right of your abiding), that you killed Him yourself (accept full responsibility), and that you have accepted into yourself all of the roasted Lamb (have taken up your cross daily and followed Him) at midnight (especially in the darkest of your hours). Don’t eat it raw or boiled (unfired or watered down), do eat it with unleavened bread (active sin still in our lives) and bitter herbs (despite ongoing, hard to bear situations).

37. Recently, a Christian missionary was working with a deaf soccer team in Gaza. He was helping them attend a special camp for deaf players in Paris. It was a great opportunity to show the love of Jesus to those deaf Muslim men. He waded through a load of red tape, arranged airline tickets and other details. Then they lacked only the $1,000. for passports because none of them could afford to buy their own. The missionary put out the word and waited, but they did not get enough money for even one passport. He and the team were disappointed.

The opportunity passed but the missionary knew that the Lord was in control. A few days ago the team leader got a message from the camp leader in Paris, saying, “Thank God for your well being. The tickets we had reserved for your return flight were on the EgyptAir plane that crashed into the sea.”

Usually we don’t get such clear confirmation that each of our disappointments is working for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to His purpose for them – Rom 8:28. But when we do get those testimonies of the glory of God and truth of His word, it is soul-helpful.

38. Paul got his revelations straight from the Lord, not from those great men who had spent years with Jesus, who had seen Him alive and dead and buried and arisen and return to heaven and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as promised. His own encounter with Jesus made him spiritually bold enough to get all he needed straight from the Lord.

He was a living dead man, greatly involved with humanity and the world but dependent upon the Lord. That’s how he could say things like “To live we must die [to ourselves],” “To be great we must humble ourselves [or be humbled by the Lord],” “To become strong we must be made weak [in our selves],” “To receive all things we must give up all things [become human-spiritually poor],” and “To get to fit into our right place we must first be trimmed and pressed upon [be and have nothing of our selves].” We often look for formulas on how to grow spiritually, don’t we. Paul had them.

The cross Jesus bore accomplished the work of our redemption. The cross we bear accomplishes the work of our spiritual maturity [becoming an overcomer ]. That is foolishness to man, but is the wisdom and power of God – 1 Cor. 1:18-31.

39. A certain segment of faithful Bible scholars is continuing to warn us about our country being in trouble spiritually. We are so full of iniquity that it is almost unimaginable, and it has come about during one generation -- mine. The list of embedded, national, big-time sins is long – homosexuality promoted as normal, abortion on demand, divorce for any reason, endemic lying and stealing, divisiveness, murder, etc.

In my opinion [which is worth as much as you make of it], the root cause is laid at the feet of the church – me, you, all of us who have been redeemed through faith in Jesus Christ. We have ceased to be God’s righteous, powerful, world-changing leaven. We need the insight of Daniel when that righteous one said, “I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed and said, ‘Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and loving kindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. Moreover, we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers and all the people of the land’” –Dan. 9:4-6.

God’s word is full of warnings and examples of what He did when His people, Israel, went beyond the tipping point. In the New Testament we are told that the things that happened to God’s people in the Old Testament happened to them for our sakes, and that those happenings were also recorded for our sakes – Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11.

Jeremiah passed along to us what God told him about the judgment coming upon His people. It seemed to them and seems to us to be unbelievable that they and we could be beyond situational, temporal redemption. Prayer for them was to be no longer effective before God, even Jeremiah’s righteous prayers. Jeremiah was instructed to stop interceding for God’s people – Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11. God said that about His people and the Holy Spirit is working to get the church to hear it.

Christians, let’s not brush that word off of us too quickly. Yes, we are His people, we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, we have the Spirit of God within us, and we are His forever. But none of that is to be used to form a lop-sided theology that would exempt us from chastisement personally and nationally. Instead, that list of bountiful and beautiful graces is why we are in trouble with the Lord our Father. He chastises those whom He loves. He says that those who get into our sort and depth of iniquity without being chastised would be bastards [KJV language], not His children. But we who are born again are His children. His grace so lavishly poured out on us is the reason we are going to be chastised nationally, if we are at that tipping point. Like my earthly father chastised my brothers and me when we needed it, but did not chastise those of the neighborhood who were not his sons, so does our heavenly Father.

Yet, some of us saints may not think we are among those sinners who may be chastised, but recall that corporate chastisement reached the prophets and other righteous ones of God’s people, and has reached and will reach us. The preserved remnant suffers along with the others before it is restored. All were slaves in Egypt; all went into slavery in Babylon, all were dispersed for 2,000 years, and not all of those who suffered were unrighteous. As the rain falls on the righteous and unrighteous, so does corporate chastisement.

We do well to select verses and lessons from the Old Testament that promise good things to God’s people when we obey Him. We would also do well when we select those verses that speak of the curses and chastisements that the Lord sends upon us when our iniquity is full.

40. Let’s think about hedges. Biblically, a hedge is a barrier formed to obstruct passage, either into or out of an abiding place, for the purpose of protecting those abiding within.

We usually think of God’s protective hedges as being for our protection from outside forces, and miss that our hedges are also for protection from ourselves, meaning we should not tear down our hedges or go outside them. See Is. 5:5 (1-7). Life examples: Relationships that have commitment, boundaries, and responsibilities (family, church, jobs, community, city, etc.); little and big decisions; and covenant making and keeping with God, brother, neighbor, and enemy.

God’s hedges do not make the devil go away, but they completely control him in relation to us. Testimony: An atheist sued Henderson County to force removal of a manger scene from the Court House lawn in Athens, Texas. His wife became ill, needed surgery, and they did not have enough money for her care. When the churches in Athens heard of the wife’s illness and their financial problem, they took up an adequate collection and gave it to them. He dropped his suit, had what was probably his first friendly relationship with Christians, and that was the end of the problem. About 5 years later he sued the mayor of Corpus Christi, Texas and a church because the church was building the largest cross in this hemisphere and the mayor had attended the groundbreaking ceremony. To him, that was a violation of church and state laws. This time, instead of his wife, he became ill and he again withdrew his suit. However, the church counter-sued him and obtained an injunction, and his promise, against his ever again filing frivolous suits. Compare to 2 Kings 6:8-23.

The devil can roar like a lion to get us to run, fear, and generally prevent our finding that the Lord is faithful and able, so that we will retreat during the battle and hopefully quit the war. He works to gain any sort of advantage over us; wants deceptive proof so that he can show others that God is unable to keep us simply through our abiding, and that it is useless to fight with our seemingly weak weapons of truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and God’s word – Eph. 6:10-17.

And, the Lord will adjust our hedges as pleases Him. See Job 1:10 (6-22). It is by faith and works during trials (not by lack of trials or by prayer without works) that we become overcomers – 1 Cor. 10:13. Overcomers are the most highly rewarded of God’s people – Rev. 3:21. They and Job stand with the Lord as He customizes their trials [hedge lowerings] to display His glory and receive eternal rewards.

What causes us to step outside our hedges? Ignorance; perhaps? Fear; perhaps? But usually it’s to do something we long for, even at the expense of sinning. See James 1:14-15.

Jesus was tempted three times during His wilderness trial to step out of His hedge of protection but He did not move. The first temptation was for Him to submit to hunger and health needs, but He depended upon the totally real and adequate food of God’s applicable word for His bodily need – Matt. 4:1-4. Then He was tempted to rely on non-Holy Spirit-scheduled miracles to prove His ministry to the religious leaders of God’s people – Matt. 4:5-7. Third, Jesus was tempted to achieve easy and quick success in His ministry by compromising only a bit for big results – Matt. 4:8-10. In each case, He declined the offer of: “Let’s step ‘outside’ so we can talk this over and accomplish God’s assignment in your life.”

Israel with Moses in the wilderness was tempted and often failed, for which they were chastised [spanked, re-taught, corrected; but fed, watered, protected, and redirected], because they were and still are God’s chosen people. Their victories and failures happened to them for our sakes, and their history was recorded for our sakes – Rom. 15:4, 1 Cor. 10:6, 11. We, too, fail and suffer God’s chastisements, because we are His chosen people, and He chastises those whom He loves – Heb. 12:4-11.

In no way does failure affect our basic relationship with the Lord, but non-abiding (unfaithfulness, disorder, and other forms of failure) does affect our lives in this world and in the next. There are differences in the lives of overcomers and non-overcomers in this life and in the next. Abiding in our customized hedges is essential. Keep your peace and the Prince of Peace will show Himself in your situation.

41. “In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if You ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full” – John 16;23-24. Jesus handed them over to His Father. He still hands us over to His Father, so that we newly born children can get to know our new Father, and in that introduction come to know Him, His ways, His graces, His requirements – all things flowing from His fatherhood to us, His children. Jesus knew all of that, so that first-born Son wants us to have a first-hand and full-time relationship with our new Father, of whom previously we had only heard about. From that point onward we will deal more directly with our Father in all matters, and He will deal more obviously with us and to us in all matters.

I don’t want to compartmentalize this too much, but Jesus is the One who said these things. We started with Jesus as the Holy Spirit led the way. As we grew up with our Big Brother we began to get acquainted with our new Father, the head of the Family. The servant-minded Holy Spirit stayed in the background doing His assignments. We were tutored until we were turned over to our Father for a more full-time and adult relationship with Him. It pleases Jesus to see His little brothers coming into our own places in the Family.

42. We sing an encouraging little ditty that says, “I see Christ in you, and you see Christ in me; praise the Lord, praise the Lord. [repeat] This is life, all other things are death, praise the Lord, praise the Lord.” I don’t think Paul knew that song, but he knew its truth, that “We regard no one according to the flesh, even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer” – 2 Cor. 5:16. What a life-giving vision of one another! The flesh finds several logical and wise reasons for us to not see one another and to not relate and trust one another that way. That view calls us further out of ourselves, brings Christ more boldly into the relationship, and gives hope to the hopeless. It transforms the needy. We project Christ when we see Him in others, and the best in others is brought forth into radiant existence.

I recall the testimony of a Christian family that owned a jewelry store in South America. They lived above the store. They took in a street person, giving him a place to sleep in the store. He was brought to salvation by their trust in him and their faith in the Lord.

43. If you want the Lord to transform our mind, think well about what you are asking. Count the cost. Do you really want to immediately forgive that person who deeply wounded you? Do you really want to be entirely available to the Lord to go to “deepest Africa” for the remainder of your life? Do you really want to give away all that you have and may have, to the poor? Those are some of the possibilities. You are asking to have the Lord’s thinking instead of yours when you are off the mark. That thinking does away with our opinions, fears, and “wisdom,” but our minds will become insightful and our emotions will become stable. We won’t become robots but our thoughts and actions will reflect the Lord’s thoughts and actions. Our false comforts will go away – some given away by us, some taken away as we cringe in human fear. But the Master will be doing it, He will be with us, and we will find ourselves abiding in Him and in His word.

Basta Ya! See you again in a month.