THOUGHTS OF APRIL, 2015

1. I will wager you one of Nancy’s delicious hamburgers that you have not understood correctly 1 John 4:18 [15-21], although you have heard, read and used it many times. Its usual understanding is that God’s perfect love casts out our fear, but that is not what John and the Holy Spirit wrote. They wrote, “Our perfect love [love perfected or being perfected in us] casts out our fear,” meaning our fear of God’s judgment or otherwise. They added in verse 20 that perfect love in us also casts out our hate. God’s greatest tool, love, is given to us to work even on ourselves.

It is not God’s love for us that is being written about in that verse, but our love for Him. Of course, we love Him because He first loved us, and it is by His grace that we can love anyone, but those verses in 1 John 4 point out that it is love in us that casts out fear from within us. Our love for the Lord or for anyone will drive out our fear of the Lord or of anyone. For example, our fear of going to a Muslim nation as a missionary will be driven out of us when we love them. Again, it is our love for the Lord that removes our fear of standing before Him at the judgment seat of Christ – not His love for us. That is a remarkable bit of unearthly architectural soul-work by our Holy Architect.

Our being afraid of God is based on our human evaluation of our sin and our deserved condemnation by a holy God to whom we are answerable, but living now in Christ’s first and second commandments removes all fear – Matt. 22:36-40. Fear is that evil strongman of Luke 11:16-23 who inhabits our flesh and controls us. Love enters in, binds fear, dispels it and its power, and becomes the proper occupier of our soul.

If you fear or hate someone, start loving them such as by understanding them, having compassion on them, submitting to their rightful authority over you, or doing something appropriate from you to them. Your developing love for them will drive out your fear of them. That’s what is written in those verses. The development of love in us does 1 Corinthians 13 in us. When brother B. W. understood the correct interpretation of John’s verse, he suddenly grasped the reason why he had changed from being apprehensive about a new relationship, to being comfortable with that person. He had been granted compassion [a form of love], and lost his several reasonable reasons for fear.

Perfected [perfecting] love is only one of the Lord’s tools for developing our righteousnesses.

If I owe you one of the world’s most delicious hamburgers, call and come on by.

2. THOUGHTS of March, 2015 ended with Thought No. 27 which read: “Mull over this Thought until next month: Much of the goings on between us and the Lord and us and others in this earthlife are not designed primarily for our sake while here in this earthlife, but for our and others’ sakes in the millennium.”

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament give us lots of information about the time of Christ’s reign on earth. It lasts for 1,000 years; He will reign over the earth from His throne in the temple in Jerusalem; it will take Him but a short while to subdue the nations that gather to make war on Him and His saints; after that war is over, some nations still will not want to do things His way but eventually they will because as long as they don’t their nation will get no rain; although all of His saints will come back with Him into the millennium, only those whom at His judgment seat He judges to be “overcomers” will reign with Him; the saints who come back with Him will each have their own miraculous body like the one He had on earth during the 40 days after His resurrection; there will also be “normal-bodied” humans [Jews and Gentiles] still alive on earth during that time; national Israel will recognize Jesus of Nazareth as their crucified, risen, ascended, returned and reigning Messiah, of the family of David; peace and justice will reign because the Perfect Dictator will use perfectly chosen power, wisdom, and love to rule the nations; and each saint who returned with Him will be individually and specifically rewarded according to how he/she allowed the Holy Spirit to work in them to change them into the likeness of Jesus and to work through them to do their specific works of Jesus during their life on earth while in their natural bodies. That means that the rewards are earned now, we are judged and “receive title” to our rewards at the judgment seat of Christ before we return to earth with Him, and that we enjoy our rewards during the millennium – in that order of things.

That’s all of the specifics about the millennium I recall at this setting. My point here is that this current earthlife is like our common schooling. In my case, during school grades 1 through 12, I went to school and studied because that was the thing everyone did. Everyone was more interested in my education than I was. During the latter years of that schooling, especially year 12, I worked harder on some courses because college was staring me in the face. I was becoming “future oriented.” In college I was somewhat more future oriented because I was aiming toward qualifying for selection into medical school. In medical school I became very much more future oriented because my work as a doctor was coming near. After medical school, as an intern, I was actually doing patient care but I was taught and overseen by experienced physicians who bore the ultimate responsibility for my patients – but my own “ultimate responsibility status” was just around the corner, so I applied myself as if each patient was entirely my responsibility.

What a growth process! But saints, we get only one pass through this earthlife school, then our final exam [Christ’s judgment seat] and promotion [rewards in the millennium]. Most of us are fortunate to have many repeat opportunities in this earthlife to improve in spiritual courses that we have flunked one or more times. And, our previous failing grades are erased from the record when we genuinely repent and confess, making restitution when possible. You can see that if I had lazed through all of those years of earthly training, I never would have made it, and if by some chance I made it, my results would not have been rewardable.

So, every born again person is going to heaven [our “going to heaven” being an eternal experience that starts on earth through faith in God’s word, goes through the earthly millennium when we and He have our miraculous bodies, then finally into the “heaven forever” life that many call “going to heaven”], but life will be different for each of us during our 1,000 year interlude between common earthlife and heaven. All believers will make it to that “heaven forever” place. This earthlife is probably our only time for salvation and growth in sanctification. Once saved [born again] our life’s purpose is not only to make us better Christians for living out our earthlife and getting others into the kingdom, but for preparing us for coming back to earth with Jesus and having a “better resurrection” life during the millennium – Heb. 11:35.

Again, Thought No. 27 of last month said that much of the goings on between us and the Lord, and us and others, in this earthlife are not designed primarily for our sake while here in this earthlife, but for our and others’ sakes in the millennium.

3. According to Mark Twain [1835-1910], American author and humorist, Presbyterian, “The two most important days in a person’s life are the day he was born, and the day he discovers why.” Good point, especially as it is applied to being born again into the kingdom of God, then discovering why [our personal calling]. Do you know what is, was, could have been, or will be your personal calling? Don’t allow yourself to give a generic answer like “being good, kind, patient and like Jesus.” Try to be specific. See Thought No. 23.

4. Have you wondered why our phone numbers, credit card numbers, social security numbers, etc., are divided into a maximum of four numbers? That’s because we can only retain new forms of information as small bursts of input. Because we live in such an information-filled life, information must be presented to us in various ways that are helpful [and attractive] to our minds.

Attention has been called “mental money.” There is only so much that we can “attend to.” Therefore, we must be careful how we spend it. Advertisers know how to divert our attention from that which currently has us, to their advertisement. One method is to overload our minds with lots and quickly presented information. The same method is used to promote deception, giving us too much information and too little time to process it before we [think we “must”] make a decision. Keeping our peace is essential to keeping a clear head and making wise and Spirit-led choices.

5. There is what can be called a spiritual ping pong game – bouncing our self [our soul] between “testing of others” and “guilt because we did” – we test others, then feel guilty for doing it, again! It’s a blind process [meaning we don’t see what we are doing at the time we do it]. We start with our testing of other’s patience and love for us, usually when we run short of love for ourselves and want others to love us despite our self-proven worthlessness. Inwardly we are shouting, “Somebody love me!” Then comes guilt when we see how we hurt those who actually did/do love us. Some suicide and threats of suicide are like that. Love does not produce 100% good results, but it is a strong medicine for this disease.

6. Formal contracts and formal covenants are good for churches and otherwise. They can develop commitment, hold participants to their word even if only for legal [or guilt] purposes, are reminders of exactly what was agreed to, and probably several other good reasons. But there are some untoward results to covenants. They can reduce deep personal relationships to shallow legal ones, supersede or weaken a personal bond or handshake that had been based on good character or genuine love for the other. The contracts of love, good character, and one’s word and handshake are things that strengthen society, even though the door is open for being taken advantage of. Ordinarily, I would rather keep the covenant on the heart level and risk being taken advantage of, even in business matters. It strengthens my character and does the same for my “contractors” of several types.

7. Perhaps only a few of us can be helped by pondering this Thought: What do the poor around us need and care about? It might help toward that answer if we did not think of them as a different species of humanity that should be pitied and helped by us in traditional ways. That approach has produced poor results [remember that I am speaking to only a few of us]. To make a basic change in our approach to the poor would require a shift in us toward Matthew 18:4; 23:12; and 1 Peter 5:6. We might reduce our flow of blessings and do something more humble like being good neighbors and listeners, personal friends, socializers, and emphasizes of their good points [“What has God given you?”]. After all, Jesus came to us and became our Best Friend and Brother, then sent the Holy Spirit to equip us for and remind us about our abundant and successful life.

As said, only a few of us need to hear and heed this as a new Thought.

8. “If someone supposes himself to be a leader, and no one is following him, he is only taking a walk,” per K. deK.

9. Have you not seen a delightful and faithful brother or sister who has been so battered and alone for years on the battlefield of their life that he/she has built up multiple defenses that are now obviously failing them? They have shored up their weak points with vastly inferior material, but perhaps the only material then available. Those defenses are crumbling and obviously they are about to fail. The enemy is pounding the gates which have been adequate so far, but fatigue, fear and insecurity have taken their toll. Something of eternal quality must happen.

As you further examine the gates and walls, you see some basic weaknesses that need changing. On closer examination you notice that those basic weaknesses have been supporting those now-crumbling defenses. Making no changes will lead to defeat or, at best, continued fatigue, fear and insecurity. Changing the crumbling defenses and basic weaknesses during battle exposes the dear one to the long-dreaded defeat, unless the Holy Spirit brings in His reserves to do battle and make repairs.

One more thing is needed. The needy one must accept the truth about his situation and be ready to drop his failing defenses. The fear-producing, crumbling defenses of the past must be abandoned before or as the changes are made. That is frightening. Changes themselves are frightening, but to voluntarily drop even failing defenses can be mortifying. Love is the answer, flowing around from person to person and to and from God. Love in the church is the motivator for change. It assures the needy of our support, of our help in healing and defense, and of success for rebuilding.

10. Ridicule of others is often a soulish technique for exalting self, but actually it belittles self.

11. Jesus said, and Matthew [6:25-33] heard Him say it, that the Lord knows what He wants us to talk with Him about, and it definitely is not food, health, clothing, items, shelter, etc. Yes, we are to go to Him with our needs, but not to fill up our conversations with them, or to pray mostly/only when we or others have a temporal need. If our focus is not on being here for Him and His kingdom’s purposes, we will slide into focusing on and praying for our temporal needs, even asking Him to love us, be gentle with and do good things instead of bad things for us and others. Can you imagine asking Him that?! That’s insulting. He does not need to be requested to love.

If we are kingdom and not self-focused, our labors and prayers will show it. That should be no surprise to us, and not be too difficult to live within, because we have been planted in this world at this time and in our places in order to further the kingdom.

12. If guilt and shame were directly helpful we would be perfect by now.

13. In a sad, dejected, aimless world we are joyful; in a frivolous, giddy, shallow world we are quiet and calm. That’s the nature of salt.

We are the world’s true conscience, and examples of how the best is receivable/attainable.

Religious icons and rites, including those prescribed in Scripture, are great for reminders of the real things, but at best they are cheap imitations of those real things. Many of the God-given reminders/imitations have already been done away with. In God’s time, when their needs have been fulfilled, all of the others will also be dispatched. All will then be reality -- initial, planned, and accomplished reality.

14. There are three things necessary if truth is to be replaced with error: 1) A reasonable counterfeit, 2) An acceptance of that counterfeit, and 3) A lack of the true original. That has to do with money, lies, processes, marriages, holocosts, news reports, etc., etc. That would not be true if humanity was not subject to the self-determination of truth – the nature of good and evil.

15. I make an effort to distinguish between renewal and revival, at least while I make some points about why some get no revival, some get some revival, and some get lots of revival. In making these points I realize that the Lord could say much more than [I think] I know, but at the same time I do need to say that which He has shown me and say it as clearly as I can. If one cares, talking and writing for the Lord can get a bit precarious at times, can’t it – Jam. 3:1?

Renewal is trimming the bush to make it look and perhaps function somewhat better. It’s cosmetic. We all get off base, over our heads, and deeply into spiritual failures, at which time our prayers go up to the Lord for “some help” when we don’t know “all of that needs to go” or at least that we need to take our hands off of it. On the other hand, revival is putting new life in a dead or dying bush. It is painful for a person or congregation or denomination to acknowledge that “we have no good thing in us. All is tainted.” Revival is the expected result of that sort of humble thinking.

Revival is the receiving of new [replacement of] life. Revival produces days of heaven on earth. It begins when the Lord touches the hearts of His people, newly convicts them of sin, and grants repentance. The common outcome of that is an intense desire to walk with and obey the Lord, resulting in an humble obedience to Him. Secret things are revealed and thrown out, bad relationships are repaired. That explains why revival commonly comes during the darkest of days, when nothing else has worked for us and we know we are at the/an end.

16. Looking from the beginning of Genesis to the end of the Revelation at the history and purpose of civil [and, incidentally, of other types of] governments is an interesting study for some of us. I did an outline study and am offering it here to you. Correct, enlarge, and improve it as you will.

All present civil, workplace, family, church, etc. governments are ordained of the Lord. That means He set them up, approves them, and that things go better for us when we submit to them [short of sinning]. None of them are perfect, some are very imperfect, but if humanity is to function, even survive, we must have order. God Himself functions in order as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. His order is so complete that They are One.

But man ruling over man was not always what He had for mankind, and is not what He plans for us in our future. It is what He wants and we need during a certain interval of our time on earth. Why humanity needs this interval is one of my study’s points, it being that we need to see that man’s governments over man are doomed to failure. Our governments always and continually gather power to themselves, and always fail at everything. Again, our governments always and continually gather power to themselves, and always fail at everything. Only God’s rule over man will succeed. In the beginning of the story of mankind on this earth, and at the end of that story, God’s Plan A is for Him to rule One-on-one over every person, not for any human to rule over any other person.

Yet, because of Adam’s curse upon us, currently we need human government systems to prevent the Judges 21:25 maladies of societal chaos and failure – the opposite of governmental failure. Considering the many frailties of man, we cannot survive by each of us doing what is right in our own eyes, whether it be nations, families, or in the workplace. Knowing good and evil [and thereby doing our own thing] will not suffice for human society. We need, and will eventually regain, access to the tree of life -- Gen. 3:22-24; Rev. 22:14, which is a direct link of fellowship with, submission to, and unity with the Lord. At our present stage, that tree of life is our faith in the work of Jesus Christ on the tree/cross, and our “work” of taking up our tree/cross daily and following Him. But that, too, will end. Their effects will continue.

So, summarizing the story so far, 1) man must learn to govern himself or face extinction, 2) man cannot govern himself, and 3) God will intervene. He Himself is the only capable ruler over mankind. Putting it another way, 1) human governments always and continually gather power to themselves and 2) they always fail at everything. Also, governments all being imperfect are better than no government at all.

Now starting in Genesis: God began everything by being Himself the creator and ruler of all. 1) Man’s first governing assignment was to rule over all animal life [including serpents!] – Gen. 1:28. 2) Man’s second governing assignment was for husband to rule over wife, and probably for men to rule over women. This rule of mankind over womankind began only after they had entered into a fallen state in their soul. Until the fall, God was the ruler over Adam and Eve independently. After the fall, God appointed Adam to rule over Eve [Gen. 3:16] but He continued His direct rule over every now-fallen man [male]. Notice that when Cain murdered Abel, God had the role of sheriff, prosecutor, judge, punisher, and protector from anyone else who would want to do His job as Ruler. 3) Man’s next ruling position was accomplished by usurpation, not assigned by God. In Genesis 6, fallen angels mated with human women and produced hybrid humans who illegally assumed rulership over part of mankind. God dealt with that invasion through the flood, protecting and continuing the pure-genes [but fallen state] of humanity through Noah who was “perfect/pure in his generations/ancestry/genes.” God was still ruling over humanity One-on-one. 4) Man’s next ruling position, again by usurpation, was formed by Nimrod through rebellion – Gen. 10:8-12; 11:1-9. 5) Then came the Patriarchs, whose leadership was by and under God and therefore legal. In and through the Patriarchs the Lord chose a small segment of humanity, granting them His presence, His promises and His provision. He was still their ruler, their King, but with the Patriarchs He began to share His rulership more broadly with chosen ones more than simply males over females.

Question: Did not God know that all of these illegal governments and their failures would happen? Answer: Yes, but humanity needed to know/experience/learn about itself and God. And we [some] have learned that truth many times over these thousands of years. In families, nations, etc. when the going got tough, or when we had failed totally, we have returned to God and He has delivered us. Israel has been our biblically-recorded example of that process.

Continuing our study of governments over God’s people: 6) Next was Israel in the wilderness and into the Promised Land, where God was still their King and others, such as Moses and Joshua, were His spokesmen. 7) Next, after a short time of partial success in the Promised Land, Israel entered into the 400 year time of the Judges. The Judges were persons whom God raised up to loosely rule and to lead them militarily. When each judge died, Israel went back into disobedience to God their King and again fell under the power of other nations. 8) The times of the judges ended when Israel began to want a king such as the nations around them had kings. This was rebellion against their invisible and usually silent God-King, and He told them so. Not only did they want a visible king, but they also wanted a visible god – idols. He gave them what they wanted, having their last judge tell them the consequences of their decision – 1 Sam. 8:1-22. Human government of God’s people stayed that way for many years, until … 9) … King Jesus established His kingdom of faith on the earth, working as leaven among the continued kingdoms of this world. 10) Then will come the fullest manifestation of earthly human kingdoms, the rule of the antichrist, for 7 years … 11) … followed by Jesus Messiah’s return to earth to rule over all for 1,000 years. Gradually, all governments will become obedient to Him, and peace and order will reign on earth. 12) However, there will be many earthlings who will have simply submitted their actions but not their hearts to Jesus during the millennium. At the end of the millennium, for a short time, Satan will be freed to work again on the earth. He will have a large following but will soon be dispatched permanently – Rev. 20:3, 7-10. This short display of sin will prove that unregenerate man is totally worthless; that redemption by God is our only solution. 13) Finally!! God’s eternal kingdom on earth will come. Our Father, His throne, and even His eternal residence will come down from heaven onto the earth. That is the heaven we speak of. God in His fullest will live among the redeemed. He will again exercise total and direct rule over each person, One on one, without any of us ruling over another. The results of all of Adam’s sins will have been corrected among the redeemed. For one of the clues to this “conclusion,” see Matthew 22:23-32.

17. “Ill habits gather by unseen degrees, as brooks make rivers, rivers run to seas.” – Ovid [43 BC – 17 AD], Roman poet.

18. Resurrection Sunday is now past. Of course, the biggest miracle of the day was Jesus’ resurrection, but there were many others. I’ll list a few of them:

1) Palm Sunday, the day Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem a week prior to His resurrection, was prophesied by Daniel right to the day – Dan. 9:24-26. He did that 600 years prior to those events. Daniel had specifically stated and written that 69 weeks of years [483 years] from a king’s [King Artaxerxes, a Persian king, on March 5, 444 BC – Neh. 2:1-8] command to rebuild and restore Jerusalem, the Jewish Messiah would present Himself to Israel, then be “cut off,” rejected, and sacrificed for the people. That is a huge prophetic event. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that day, exactly as Daniel said He would, on April 3, 33 AD [calculations are variable].

2) Jesus presented himself on a donkey [Zech. 9:9] to Israel on Palm Sunday. The people were calling Him the Messiah, the expected son of David, their new king. They knew what was going on biblically, but only partially. Four days later He was arrested, beaten, “tried,” and executed. They took His dead body down from the cross before sundown because sundown would be the beginning of Passover, a Sabbath day when no “work” was to be done.

In Exodus 12, the Lord had instructed Moses on the process for preparing the sacrificial lamb for Passover. Each household was to select one and pen it up for 4 days, observing it for the required perfection, and [likely] becoming attached to it emotionally. “Why does an innocent lamb need to die because we sinned,” was probably asked many times by the children. Some form of, “Because God requires it” would be the answer. When killed on Passover, the lamb was to be entirely eaten with bitter herbs the same day; not a part was to be left over. Its purpose needed to be completed in that one day. Also of note, not a bone of the lamb was to be broken – Ps. 34-20; John 19:33.

19. Character traits like boldness, faith, hope, and love are vital components for moving into a vision or moving with another’s vision. They keep us motivated and moving. Hindrances to the fulfillment of a vision are, 1) heavy anchors to the past which act like concrete shoes and, 2) poor motivation for the vision. Perhaps recklessness should be added to that list of good traits, along with one’s flight from the past and into whatever is ahead [fleeing to Jesus].

20. One of the reasons the Lord forgives Christians of our sinnings is to relieve us of the burden of those sins so we, His family, can go about focusing on finishing life, service, and godly character development in our time as is yet allotted. Of course, we are also forgiven of our sins so we will be able to appear before Him at the judgment seat of Christ without fear or shame, guiltless if we are confessed-up. That court appearance is designed to be a very positive and even joyful event. Some will hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” No one will have been absolutely sinless on earth – far from it, so the “well-done” compliment is not because of sinless performance, but for having had the heart to come clean after sinning.

Don’t be among those saints who continue carrying a heavy burden about their forgiven sins after they have repented of and confessed them. Use every reminder of those forgiven sins as an opportunity to praise the Lord and express your love for and devotion to Him. As Israel was instructed by God to remember annually their years of slavery in Egypt, they and we are to make it a positive remembrance of total forgiveness and deliverance, without those recollections continuing as burdens.

Can you imagine, at your appearance before His judgment seat, His saying anything about the sins of which He had forgiven you? We have been washed. He has separated us from our sins as far as the East is from the West. Genuine repentance, and faith in His ability and truthfulness, will deliver us from shame, false on-going guilt, self-condemnation, and the continued load of our past sinfulness. His blood is fully efficacious, even for the worst and most sinners.

21. If a society is not adequately Christianized, the free market principle will lead to greed. But where it is adequately Christianized, that society prospers. Why? Because it is the way of freedom. Therein is seen the social responsibility of the church, a natural outcome of faith in Jesus Christ. Without Christ alive in the church, neither the church nor the marketplace [nor government] works the best that it can.

Not only is the church the proper and only arena for developing virtue in society, but it is the encourager of temporal decision-making, of the formation of values, of the daily exercise of morality, of the use of power and charity. In short, the workplace provides laboratory sessions which prove the didactic teaching of the church, much more than being society’s evidence of the church’s presence. Indeed, society makes the presence and spiritual health of the church conspicuous, and proves that the basics of profit, wealth, and private property are necessary and moral. All economic groups rejoice and thank God for His material blessings when less time is required to work for one’s survival, basics of life are available and accomplishable, and we have ranges of life-options to satisfy freed minds.

22. “When we do for those in need what they have the capacity to do for themselves, we disempower them.” – Bob Lupton, Christian, living American writer and anti-poverty activist. That is not only a helpful thought in regards to socio-economic life, but to life in the kingdom. He is speaking to everyone, but especially to missionaries and volunteers, about the cure of poverty, of making real and lasting changes.

23. Nathaniel Macon [1757-1837], Christian Baptist, North Carolina politician of many state and federal offices [Speaker of the U. S. House of Representatives, member of U. S. Senate, etc.] turned down every cabinet position offered to him and refused to run for vice-president or president. He never actively campaigned for office or solicited votes over his 24 years of elective public office. He never lost an election. Live on!, brother Nathaniel. He knew and lived by Thought No. 3.

24. Do you know that the world hates you? It does, even though the worst of the haters do not live next door. But we have brothers and sisters who do have hateful neighbors, and who suffer all manner of persecution from those neighbors. Jesus said, “If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you” – John 15:18-19. That should shake our bones down to their marrow and send us in search of our crosses.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer [1905-1945], German Lutheran pastor and martyr, wrote, “Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. Costly grace is the gospel which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.”

Let’s be bold in the life the Lord has customized for us today.

25. Talking about there being a cost to receiving answers to our prayers can be unpopular among those who were raised on only “ask and receive.” When Jesus said we could ask and we would receive, He was speaking to disciples and to those who wanted to be disciples, and knew what discipleship was – Matt. 5:1-2; 7:7-8.

Discipleship is costly; involving “musts” like, 1) hating our natural family [Luke 14:26], 2) carrying our own cross [Luke 14:27], 3) giving up all of our possessions [Luke 14:33], 4) increased obedience to His word [John 8:31], and 5) loving one another like He loves us [John 13:34-35]. Being one of His disciples is inconvenient; thinking about becoming one is disturbing to one’s religiosity [or vs.]. A disciple’s life is revolutionized, not simply improved. Where we were strong we become weak; where we were weak we become strong. Where we were rich we become poor; where we were poor we become rich.

When you were seeking employment, you knew that your pay check was going to cost you something – 1) forsaking your family [hour after hour, day after day, month after month, year after year], 2) taking on significant responsibilities [hard work, sweat, late hours], 3) taking risks [buying a car for transportation, new clothing, saying “No” to dishonest or distracting offers], 4) continually learning about and adjusting to new conditions at work, and 5) working with and getting alone with coworkers who would not be as congenial as yourself. Those were some of the costs you counted before accepting that job. Discipleship is of that sort.

If you are a disciple of Jesus, He will arrange your discipleship to your world involvements.

26. Vladamir Lossky [1903-1958], exiled Russian Orthodox Christian theologian, offered this definition of evil, “.. nothing other than an attraction of the will towards nothing, a negation of being, of creation, and above all of God, a furious hatred of grace against which the rebellious will puts up an implacable resistance.” That’s a bit higher thinking than I ordinarily am accustomed to, but good.

27. There are many forms of civil government. Ours in America has a constitution which separates our ruling functions into three basic parts, the Legislative [law making], the Executive [carrying out the laws], and the Judicial [judging cases under the laws enacted]. Our founding fathers divided our governmental powers because they knew full-well the evil that resides in the heart of mankind.

General George Washington, the commander of our Continental Army and our first president, refused a third term as president and refused to be made king because he knew his own frailty and that of all men. The best form of human government he and his co-founders could devise was a constitutional republic. If the people would accept that form of government, and would keep it, they believed that an enduring good government was possible.

Those men also knew about God’s form of government, that it required God to be its head and to enforce it. They knew that such leadership was yet to come on earth. Short of that coming, man had to do with the best government possible, one that had two clear purposes: 1) fidelity to the object of government, which is the happiness of the people, and 2) knowledge of the means by which that object can be best attained. Thus our government of checks and balances among elected leaders who must work under a constitution that both gives and withholds the powers of that government, keeping the ultimate power in the hands of the people.

What great insight they had into Genesis chapter 3! Man already had speech, now he had reasoning power. He could [and had to] evaluate his circumstances, cooperate with others, agree on laws, and form governments that eventually would have electorates. All of that process required leadership with an ear to the people. The best also had a heart for the people. They were not only responsible for providing leadership but accountable to the voters for accomplishing good results.

Over the millennia of Bible history, the best governments also have not exempted themselves from their own laws [Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon, and others], and have provided long periods of order and stability. Peace was a mark of those governments but when war or some other stress was unavoidable [Joseph and Pharaoh in Egypt’s drought], changes were made with clarity of purpose and without prejudice. Those governments survived, thrived, and were respected.

This Thought is not meant to say that America’s form of government is better than all others. Here, we are currently living through a weakness. In many ways, our government is ruling contrary to our constitutional principles. Some forces are pushing for complete removal of constitutional restraints. The more we move in that direction, the closer we are to a ruling elite and a dictator. Jesus is the only person capable of ruling in that mode, and He will. Meanwhile, we must make the most of the governmental systems we have, and establish God’s government in the church as perfectly as possible. The second will help the first.

28. A couple of us were visiting with a highly respected and increasingly beloved local leader today in his office. We do that regularly, and have for several years. At one point he surprised us by saying, “I enjoy meeting with you because you listen to me.” I already knew that when he talks everyone listens, but that was not what he meant. After we thought about it a bit, we realized that what he said is that we really hear what he says, what is coming from his heart. And when we respond we respond on the same level, speaking the same language to his heart. He was saying that we communicate, not just speak and understand English.

29. In Leviticus chapter 8, out of all Israel, Aaron and his sons had been consecrated in [dedicated to, set aside for] the office of priest, a dedication that is now offered to every born again Christian. That priesthood is described as a kingdom of priests – those who represent God’s people to Him [vs. kings who represent God to His people]. In chapter 9 Aaron offered sacrifices in accordance with God’s instructions, so that the sacrifices would be efficacious for what they were meant to be – the forgiveness of Israel’s sins [actually, the diminishment of Israel in Israel’s eyes] and the reception of God’s peace [or, the increase of Jehovah in Israel’s eyes]. Immediately fire came out from before the Lord [from within the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle] and consumed their offering, showing God’s presence and approval.

Soon thereafter, two of Aaron’s son’s, who had also been consecrated to the priesthood, tried to duplicate the event of bringing the fire of God (life, power, spirit) forth from Him, which would indicate His approval of and presence with them. Indeed, as before, fire came from the Lord, but this time it consumed them, not their offering.

Moses had their bodies taken from in front of the sanctuary [the place of ministry before and to the Lord] to outside the camp [the place of uselessness and separation]. Then Moses told Aaron and his family that because the anointing oil [of the priesthood] was on them they were not to grieve over the two deaths, or else the entire congregation would [not understand that God had done it, why He had done it, and would] suffer instead of learn from the occasion. But He told the congregation of non-priest believers that they could grieve at the deaths – a very human thing to do, and showing poor insight. Compare to being ‘cut off” in John 15:1-11, being disciplined in Matthew 18:15-17, loving Jesus more than family in Matthew 10:37, and Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11.

The message to believers from that occasion is as clear as it is severe. Don’t try to duplicate God’s fire. Counterfeiting the Holy Spirit’s presence or His actions is death dealing. There are many things that only the Lord can do, and He needs no help doing them. He wants and has priests, those who have responded to Him by offering themselves and all that they have to Him. They learn to discern His presence and to yield to Him because the work of God must be done by Him. When we try, we dry up, shrivel, and die spiritually. When we see that happen to others, we are not to grieve, understanding that our righteous God did it. Knowing that His justice has been meted out mitigates human grief among priests. Those who are not priests, but are human-centered, are left to grieve and to deal with the humanness of the tragedy, such as that of spiritually dying congregations, denominations, individuals, and programs.

Priests, the promises of Christ Jesus are not to be applied to those to whom they do not apply [the irreverent, unbelieving, and natural-minded] – Matt. 7:6.

30. How are your vanity and pride levels doing? Both have to do with our selves. Vanity is a function of our soul having to do with what we want others to think of us, and pride is a function having to do with what we think of ourselves.

Vanity is the emptiness beyond the reality. To live, trust, or go beyond reality [beyond the truth] in any way makes us a vain person. Remember that the Lord and our faith in Him is not vanity. He and faith in Him are substance – Heb. 11:1. To put our faith in idols [wealth, health, social or professional position, etc.] beyond that which is God’s plan for us, is to follow vanity [empty nothingness] and become vain [empty nothings] – 2 Kings 17:15.

David knew that flattery and double heartedness were not only falsehoods but were empty – having gone beyond the substance about someone, or himself. Solomon wrote that wealth obtained by making others think more of us than is true results in our loss – Prov. 13:11. Paul wrote to the church that humanity has been subjected to the emptiness of wanting others to think differently of us than is the truth about us – Rom. 8:20. That’s emptiness, empty headedness, and obviously not a Christ-centered focus.

I suppose that it can be said that, “You shall know the truth [about “me,” our selves – ed.] and the truth will set you free [in regards to “me” – ed.]. Again, Solomon had it right when He perceived that we want others to see us beyond that which we are, whether of beauty, manhood, accomplishments, possessions, etc. – Eccl. 1:2. Finally, Jesus said, “.. do not use vain repetitions ..” when we pray, meaning that when we pray we are not to add empty words beyond the words that are truthful, meaningful, timely, and flow consciously from our heart to His.

Then there is the matter of pride, meaning that which we think of ourselves. Satan thought that he and his ways were better than God and His ways, and down he went – Is. 14:4-21; Ezek. 28:11-19; Luke 10:18. Unfortunately, we have been infected with that virus. What is the cure? You know the answer! It is giving our life in its every detail to Him, becoming a vital part of His body [the church], and walking in faith with Him and love with one another.

The Holy Spirit is a good scrubber of our souls – 1 John 1:9. No matter what is inside of us, no matter how we have defiled our bodies and souls, He scrubs us whiter than snow.

31. I have heard it said that Jesus sent us out to witness. Actually, He sent us out to be witnesses, not to witness. If we are witnesses, we testify -- we testify by character and word.

While I’m in a teachy mood: I’m sure you have heard someone interrupt another, say briefly what he had to say, then yield the floor back to the one he had interrupted, saying, “Sorry; I didn’t mean to interrupt you.” But, that’s exactly what he meant to do -- interrupt. He should have yielded back the floor by saying, “I’m sorry for interrupting you,” [if he is truly sorry] or “Thank you for allowing me to insert an important point.” Using the word “sorry” is expressing regret, whereas an orderly interruption is important and proper – 1 Cor. 14:26-33.

32. “Fear defeats more people than any other thing in the world” – Ralph Waldo Emerson,[1803-1882], American philosopher, essayist, and poet. I have yielded to fear many times. Now I [usually] walk directly into it when I see it coming.

33. In some districts in India, the authorities are reported to be working “hand-in-glove” with radical Hindu nationalists who equate being born in India with irrevocable adherence to Hinduism. Extreme persecutions are common, including martyrdom, for those who disclaim being Hindu, such as by becoming Christians.

Question: Do we adhere to an aspect of that theology of “native-born religion?” If one has been born naturally into a Christian family, and perhaps raised up in a church, is he therefore a Christian?

34. “A revival almost always begins among the laity. The ecclesiastical leaders seldom welcome reformation. History repeats itself. The present leaders are too comfortably situated as a rule to desire innovation that might require sacrifice on their part. And God’s fire only falls on sacrifice. An empty altar receives no fire.” – Frank Bartleman [1871-1936], American Christian leader and writer. This brother had little or no success if he stayed long in one place or limited himself to one religious tradition. Thus, he became Roman Catholic, Baptist, Salvation Army, Pentecostal, and Methodist. He served the church by being broadly educated, broadly experienced, and broadly bonded with Jesus’ church in all of its expressions of worship and life. He is an important chronicler of the Holy Spirit’s work in the early 1900s. He communicated with leaders in Europe about Holy Spirit revival, and traveled there occasionally, but was almost entirely involved in America.

35. “If you are irritated by every rub, how will your mirror be polished?” – Rumi [1207-1273], Persian poet, jurist, and Islamic theologian. Christians are not always right, Islamics are not always wrong.

36. John wrote [1 John 3:1] that the reason the world does not know/appreciate/understand/accept us is because it did not know/appreciate/understand/accept Jesus. Do you see it? The “it” is that if the world does know/appreciate/understand/accept us it is because we are more like the world than like Jesus. Is “it” outdated? Can John’s word by the Holy Spirit be applied to us in that way?

Listen to Jesus as John recorded Him in John 15:18-21: “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.”

Perhaps the world some of us live in is still sufficiently Christianized so that it does not hate/persecute us. Many of our brothers and sisters elsewhere are being beaten, jailed, starved and martyred. In America, Christ’s testimony is being removed from our culture, and Christians are being persecuted openly. Much more is coming. “The world” is rising up against us. Don’t be surprised or afraid. It is our time. We are on God’s schedule, as is the world, but woe to those who harm Jesus’ bride, the church.

37. John continued writing in 1 John 3:2, saying [my paraphrase]: “Family, we are already and forever God’s children, although it still looks like we are only human. We know that, but spiritual truth is not perceived by the world. We know that when we lay down this human body we will receive our eternally supernatural body. That change will be granted us when we arrive at that time and place, and see Jesus in His own supernatural body.”

38. Ordinarily, when political pressure against the church has reached a critical point, the splintered church bands together and agrees to support certain politicians and programs. But, that can be an indication that things have already deteriorated too far, and that the church has chosen the world’s weapons instead of God’s mighty weapons.

Politics will not win the war; joining the world on the battlefield of its choosing and using the world’s weapons makes us losers. Those efforts may appear to win a few battles, but that is deceptive – it encourages the church to continue its divisions except when squeezed together temporarily by something political, then to continue fighting politically. That is a red light and siren alarm, an indication that the church has already lost its society and thus the war. The answer: repent of our division and our unbiblical ways, and start over with loving the Lord with everything we are and have, and our neighbor as our self.

It is amazing what we will do to avoid that life-giving process.

In regards to repenting, there is considerable resistance, especially among those who need most to repent. As a doctor, I saw the same process expressed medically among my patients, some of whose bodies were so badly ruined by their bad habits [smoking, excess drinking, overeating] that basic repentance of lifestyle was needed before I could do much to help them. However, they wanted medical blessings without change of their basics. No need for me to interpret that little parable.

39. The Old Testament prophets used the term, “Thus says the Lord, …” They had little responsibility other than the passing on of God’s word to mankind. We use similar words when we counsel, teach, and preach but, in addition, we are taught to be like the One who sent us. When we are adequately informed biblically, have learned to walk in the Spirit, and know the Lord well enough, we can speak from our hearts and be in full agreement with all else He has said for millennia.

40. I think that if we knew everything about a person, we would have little or no difficulty forgiving him. If that is so, it is important to know more about people than we do – when we adversely judge them or do not forgive them [not much difference there]. If so, our righteousness toward them may start as simple tolerance, grow into compassion, then to heart-felt forgiveness. During our spiritual growth process they may never change [but probably would], may never repent of their evil deeds [but probably would], but we would [probably].

That describes the process God went through. He tolerated us, had compassion on us, then sent His Son to arrange and deliver His forgiveness. He now forgives us because He qualified Himself by having experienced our weakness. Those who have received this sort of mercy are indebted to pass it on.

41. We usually are content to know that a person’s actions are good, perhaps even without blemish, when we evaluate them for friendship or employment, such as for babysitting our children. How important is it to you, knowing someone’s righteous behavior, to also know his thoughts and the possible turmoil of soul he experiences in maintaining his righteous behavior? Example: If you knew he had never stolen anything but was often sorely tempted to steal, would you hire him as your treasurer, or to work in your jewelry story, or as your accountant? That’s the sort of situation Jesus spoke to in Matthew 5, that our righteousness had to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. To entrust us with His riches, we have to do better than our outer appearance and performance indicates of us.

42. The nature of our human mind, whether Christian or otherwise, is to narrow available information down until it forms what we consider to be a clear and complete picture, such as with religious doctrine. To do that, we are all-to-willing to set aside or mis/re-interpret outlying information. But the Lord has provided for us in that weakness. The philosopher’s job, whether he is or is not a professional, is to re-expand our narrowness to include those outliers. But they, philosophers, are noted for going much further than into incorporating broader thinking and rescuing rejected information. They are noted for giving total importance to human reasoning, or by giving no importance to God’s reasoning.

But wait! Jesus was the perfect philosopher. The Jewish religious leaders of Jesus’ day had narrowed down their understanding of God’s words so [they thought] His words would fit into the narrowness of their religious human minds. That approach deprived them of truth and life and enabled them to add “reasonable” non-God thinking and treat it as if it was God-thinking. Examples of how Jesus the philosopher re-expanded God’s word for the religious leaders [and you know many more]: If you hate your brother [without just reason?], you have committed murder. If you lust after a woman other than your wife, you have committed adultery.

43. Question: What is the one thing that the Lord wants to be informed about by us? We can and should talk to Him about anything, but what of the nature of information does He want to hear from us? Surely, He already knows that Mrs. Smith is in room 314 of the surgical hospital and will have gall bladder surgery, so that’s not the nature of things He needs or wants to hear, although He does want to share with us His concern for her in heartfelt conversation.

We know that He already knows everything so lacks no information on anything. He is the All-Knowing One. But there is something along the line of information that He does want us to tell Him about. You know the answer -- 1 John 1:9. He wants to hear from us the best insight that we have into ourselves [selves = souls] which, if we are serious, He will enhance for the occasion.