THOUGHTS OF JANUARY, 2020

1. It’s time again to check on who is and is not reading these THOUGHTS, so that my mailing list can be reduced to only you who are interested, and you others will not have your mail boxes cluttered. The method: If I have not heard from you via e-mail during February [this month] I will delete your name from my list [but not from my memory and heart]. Later, if you want back on the list, just ask. This will be the only mailing list deletion notice this year. Thank you.
2. The year 2020 has promise of great days for the faithful, the church, those who know and love and purpose to obey the Lord. That means that we should not expect smooth, easy flowing lives, but stormy waters – with opportunity for both quick and eventual victories. The good news is that Jesus Christ is the only and our personal Victory, and He is within each of us who are described in sentence one of this paragraph.

For those of the culture-directed, religious church, the days ahead will be smoother and less stressful as you flow with and contribute to the apostasy of all things, secular and religious. But the faithful will accept God’s opportunity to be His voice and example to a world that is falling apart, and from which many are yet to be rescued.

As in business, the way of the cross requires a multitude of decision-making occasions – many risky opportunities. What makes Christian businesspersons’ lives easier than many others is that their basic decision has already been made when they plunged into business, and the smaller ones fall into place easier, getting them out of slop-along, painful lives of making decisions on whether to choose the cross from event to event. Business people recognize this dynamic, which is why they tend to make solid, cross-walking, purposeful Christians.

1. So, what does it mean to take up our crosses daily and follow the Lord? Not many of us in America or in the Western World will have opportunity to be crucified physically and literally; elsewhere, yes, but here, not yet.

When the Lord called all believers to their/our crosses He was not requiring us to do something that He had already done on His cross, such as something to accomplish forgiveness of our sins. Instead, He called us to lay down our “selves,” our “me firsts,” and to surrender all that we are and have to Him. Then those “dying to self” decisions occur day by day and moment by moment as the Eternal Engineer enjoys His workmanship among His chosen ones, His beloveds.

In summation, the commandment of God is that we love Him with everything we are and have. As usual, His commandments are meant to reveal our souls, to drive us to Him on our knees, and to receive mercy for obedience.

1. With Income Tax time just around the corner, remember that it is more deductible to give than to receive.
2. What is the longest word in the English language? Answer: Smiles, because there is a mile between the first and last letters.
3. Notice the purpose of the armor of God: “standing firm,” “resisting,” “standing firm,” “standing firm,” and “extinguishing flaming arrows” – Eph. 6:10-17. The description of God’s purpose for our armor should help our understanding of our function [position, purpose and place] in the Lord’s army.
4. Here is another opportunity for self-evaluation. Jesus often spoke in parables, prophetic declarations of spiritual truth, designed to give us insight into His spiritual kingdom. Concealing spiritual truth was/is necessary, He said, because only those having a relationship to Him [disciples] are to be given it – Luke 8:10. Passive listeners were not to be fed His pearls – Matt. 7:6. But He would explain all of them to true followers, whom He called disciples.

Similar to not casting His pearls before swine is shaking off the dust from our feet when our message is not received – Matt. 10:11; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5. His words are precious possessions. Evaluate yourself. How precious is His word to you? Are you hungry for it, and how does your hunger show? Have you been and are you being changed by His word? How do you yet need to be changed? Share your silent answers with someone.

1. When God created mankind, He created us fail-sure. There was no way He could have created us perfection-sure, there being no life in or relationship with zombies or robots. We had to fail, to have no way within ourselves of redeeming ourselves, to accept the only Person and Way for our redemption, and it all be of Him. Yes, we were impossibly and totally dead in our sins and humanity, but have been made alive together with Christ. Now, and in the ages to come, His plan is to show the surpassing riches of His grace [imagine that for a moment!] to all who are in Christ Jesus.

He who began a work of saving grace in us, through faith, and that not of ourselves, it being a gift of God, made it firm that we are entirely His workmanship. In eternal love and wisdom, He selected us, placed His Spirit inside of us, and immersed us in His Son, without whom we humans can be and are beautifully religious, but spiritually dead. And now our heavenly Father sees us already seated with Jesus in heaven. That which our Father sees makes it reality, accomplished, boxed with a bow on top, done! We are there.

So why is it important for the earth-bound redeemed to take up our crosses daily and follow Him? Is that something we do which, to some degree, contributes to our salvation? No, our cross is a dead, nothing-person’s action, a hands-off, living death that by God’s grace sets us free in Christ. It is more real than the bondage to sin that formerly imprisoned us. Our cross is not a mere theological teaching. It is a powerful, functionable, spiritual principle of Life that overcomes our above-described death. It is God’s overcoming power being revealed in the midst of our inability. While still here in the body of this death, we live in Him by the power of God.

You recognized Ephesian 2 and 2 Corinthians 13, didn’t you?

An addendum: Walking the way of the cross can be a bit scary at first, but going through dark times in order to come into greater light pays off. The cross-walk defeats darkness within and around you according to God’s plan, which sometimes does not match with our presuppositions. The power of faithful humility is revealed, like in Joseph’s life in Egypt when he submitted to the puny powers of darkness and received the dynamic power of God in his personal life, family life, work life, and socio-political life.

At the end of His earth-life, Jesus told the devil “this is your hour,” but it was brief, necessary, and powerful for producing Life. Getting nailed to our cross is often the most unfair events in our day, but the most encouraging, even in advance for the experienced cross-bearer. Going through the appearance of evil’s victory is not encouraging to our flesh, but it is only a brief appearance, and a non-appearance to the habitual cross-bearer [according to reports that I have heard – ed.]. But in the entire process the Lord is glorified, as so are we eventually when He makes known all things and uses that revealed “all truth” to make all things new. That includes us. The results: We cannot lose.

1. Remember the thrill of inheriting something, something unearned that was important to the deceased person who knew and loved you, and wanted you to have it? It was exciting, wasn’t it. Do you remember the most important thing you inherited? I know what it was – your salvation – Heb. 1:14. Isn’t it good to know that it did not come by UPS or FedEx, but was delivered by angels on special assignment, and that they are in attendance to assure its maintenance and eternal possession.

I’m not much into studying and relating to angels, but the Lord has them involved in His plans and for our lives, so I give honors to Him and to them. Worshipping them is a separate thing, and not to be done. In fact, they deflect our every effort to do that, instead reminding us to worship only the Lord – Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9 vs. Rev. 1:17-18.

1. One day Jesus was talking about salvation and the requirements of discipleship – Mark 10:23-31. His disciples were obviously already His disciples, so Peter, wanting to nail down their/his position, said, “We have given up all to follow you.” Jesus’ response was, “That is a good start, Peter, but you have not yet finished your course” [my paraphrase – ed.]. Yet, in Jesus’ teachings He stressed that it was not what we give up of things, but that we give up one special thing – our way, our self, the big ME. For that He provided the Holy Spirit, which religious humanity rejects as God’s replacement for that big ME. It is our loss when we reject the exchange or accept His help only when we think we need Him.

Human, even Christian, hearts are often divided, working against our own good and against God. That reality [sin] makes it necessary to have civil government to restrain us. In turn, the state must be limited in its power and jurisdiction, including the frequent “utopian solutions” that are contrary to essentials, essentials meaning 1) faith in the Lord, 2) moral restraint according to simple, natural reason, 3) and the necessity of grace [because this is a fallen world]. The world can offer us nothing that is able to replace those three essentials; but it tries, and the naive fall for the offer.

1. On “liking and loving,” thanks to A. H.: I like the universe and its unimaginable vastness. Its measurements are mind-blowing. Light from distant stars left there thousands of years ago, traveling at 186,000 miles per second for thousands of years to twinkle above our heads tonight. The constellations of the stars have been the same for thousands of years, and are still used for reliable navigation. The only major change in them is when a supernova blows a star apart, which is rare. Interestingly, a good candidate for a supernova is Betelgeuse, a Red Giant which will someday collapse on itself, with a cataclysmic outcome to be recorded on Earth in Earth time. You may find Betelgeuse in the constellation of Orion in the southern sky, it being the upper left star and has a slightly red tinge to it. Of course, it may have already blown up, but if it happened yesterday, we will not know about it for 11 years.

When the Lord spoke at length to Job of His greatness, majesty and power, He specifically mentioned Orion, saying “Can you loosen Orion’s belt” [the three offset stars in the middle of the constellation] – Job 38:31? That question was meant to minimize Job [and us] so that we would become little in our own eyes. The Lord can use faithful, little people. In verse 32 the Lord also mentions the “Bear and her cubs” [Ursa major and minor, or the big and little dippers]. All of these vast creations were from His hand and fit in His hand. He encompasses the universe very easily, with lots of Himself to spare. He constructed it, understands it, and controls it. That is one of His many ways of revealing Himself to us, and things about Himself, so we will be appropriately adjusted in our attitude about Him. He is unlimited in all ways.

Job had no answer for the Lord [that was a good response] except that he recognized his lack of worth, and decided to say no more [and that’s a better response]. He acknowledged his lack of understanding, and that the Lord was too wonderful [yet-unrevealed mind-blowing marvels] for him to know. In 42:5-6 Job says, “My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you.” The veil had been [partly] lifted off of Job’s understanding. What a blessing! He was given a better understanding of the character and magnitude of the Lord God Almighty. The effect of God’s revelation caused Job to say, “Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” He was completely undone. It was like a “near death” experience, producing a greater respect for and fear of the Holy God.

1. H. says, “I like the universe, but I love the Lord who made it.”
2. Why did the big majority of Jesus’ ministry happen in the countryside, not in the temple or in synagogues? He was a practicing Jew, so went up to Jerusalem for the feasts and to the synagogues on the sabbath, but lived and preached mostly outside of centers of the religion that He came to revive.

I cannot give you a definite answer here, but I can give you what I consider a probable answer. He was commonly rejected and removed from the seats of religion, but outside those centers He was “come to” by those who [mostly] wanted to hear Him and to be with Him. The spiritually deaf ones and the dissenters could come to His countryside meetings and heckle Him, but otherwise left Him alone and departed the meetings, leaving Him to be fruitful to the receptive multitudes. When it was time for the end of His ministry and life, He went to and stayed in or next to Jerusalem.

But have you not considered it unusual that the Messiah did not come principally to, and stay in, Jerusalem, teaching and worshipping in the temple? Think about that, and that He may have set us a pattern. Outside of Jerusalem, even in the wilderness, is where God’s people were encouraged to prepare a way for Him and to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Perhaps in our Jerusalems we spend too much time and effort trying to get the Lord to come in where He is not wanted, is judged, is criticized and minimized, and is eventually thrown out. Our Jerusalems have fallen into the hands of our Jerusalems [or, the church has fallen into the hands of the church], where spirit and truth are out of date and politically incorrect. Jesus Christ came to give us the Kingdom of God. The church is the current earthly manifestation of the Kingdom of God, no part

 of which belongs to us, its citizens.

Here applies Jesus’ teaching of the wheat and tares, the faithful and the religious, which He said will continue growing together until the end of the times, when angels will separate the two. How will the separation happen? My opinion is that it will be in common ways, such as by persecutions, which always separate true love and faith in Jesus from self-centered, carnal religiosity. The un-regenerated mind and un-reborn soul of natural, religious humanity cannot long stand against the unlimited promises of socialism.

1. In my lifetime [currently of 89 9/12 years] I have seen socialism kill over 80,000,000 people. in order to do that, socialism has to get into control, which it does by promising whatever sounds good to the flesh, meaning, “Promise whatever is necessary to win votes.” Therefore, it flourishes when the church [the preachers of the way of the cross, meaning “Jesus’ life through death to our flesh”] flounders. Even when socialism transitions to its eventual conclusion [totalitarianism, usually called Communism] and is finally defeated, it is still sought by many instead of Jesus Christ. Proverb 29:18 says, “Where there is no godly insight the people do whatever seems desirable, but happy is he who knows and keeps God’s simple laws of human nature.” [Notice my adjustments – ed.] Disastrous times follow disinterest in, resistance to, or rejection of scripture.
2. Jesus had His ways. First, He had His personal purpose, to walk before His Father in son-type fellowship and humble obedience. Then, to gather and prepare a group of men who would do the same with Him, whom He could prepare for the work in His coming physical absence. That would require simple, yet profound, conditions and actions that have not changed here in year 2020.

They had to be with Him, and to learn that life and ministry were entered through the cross – His and their own. If they would be with Him, they would have something to give others when they were sent out – they would be prepared for receiving power from above and would have something world-changing to say. He modeled both requirements before them, and almost all of them absorbed His lessons.

One of them, Judas, adsorbed but did not absorb. That is this Thought. Judas took to himself all that he understood and wanted, but did not take it in. The eleven took it in, even if they did not understand, because they were in the process of dying to themselves. Judas was accomplishing his own purposes; the eleven were dying. Poor Judas.

1. Jesus and His Father were one. When we are reborn of the Spirit, we too are one with our Father – one with the God of the whole universe. You say you are far from living that reality? So what?! Jesus had to grow into that knowledge all of His life, from the time of His human birth onward. He did it by faith, as He was fed the truth at home, in the synagogue, in the temple, at work, on the hillsides, both day and night – all of His life. Let’s simply follow Him. Avoid the impossibility of creating our own life and future. We are to be His workmanship.
2. A person who recalls that which the Lord treasures will rejoice in every circumstance. Nothing is by accident. All sacrifice and all suffering are redemptive. Therein is the clue to holy power when faithfully under authority. Remember the example of Joseph in Egypt.
3. The Lord’s goal for us is not simply and wonderfully to be born again, but as His then newborn children to be disciplined into the character and function of our elder brother, Jesus – “.. make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; ..”. It is tragic when, after 10 or even 40 years, a baby is still a baby, gaining age in years but not becoming a responsible adult.

When a spiritually reborn baby Christian [having entered the gate] does not get on and stay on the path [the way that leads to the life offered by our Father], we come short of His “best offer.” As that happens, He does not “unborn” us, but we do not attain to the best calling to which we were chosen and called. Of course, it may be said [accurately] that no one other than Jesus attained perfectly to His calling, so we are led to believe that our Father has many roles for us to play in the present and the hereafter, dependent upon the degree or quality of our individual responses to Him – our righteousness and faithfulness to Him.

The result of this Thought: We will trust and obey Him, and He will sort out our futures in the ages to come. The ages? Yes. Now, the church age; next, the millennial age; then, the heaven-on-earth age. He has us, the time, the patience, and the ability to get it done. We are His workmanship. The “it” to be done? Changing us into Jesuses. For what reason? For oneness and fellowship within God, and to do the works of God in Christ. What are those works? If you are ready to stretch your currently-being-remade minds into the more-ultimate purposes of God [being more reluctant to think too little than to think too big] – to have fellowship with the Trinity forever, and to fulfill our individual callings as Messiahs on the millions of to-be-inhabitable planets in the universe.

Why all of that?! Because God is Love. His infinite love must be expressed in infinite ways and to its infinite fullness. If you have entered the gate, ask Him to renew your mind in the direction of infinity, where His is. As has already been happening between the both of us, I’ll see you along the way. Don’t dawdle.

1. No, Jesus’ message was not, “Repent, and try harder.” His and the Bible’s message is, “Repent, and turn to the Lord. Cast your all upon Him and He will direct your path/behavior/decisions.” Within ourselves we can do nothing, which is the same as we can do nothing within ourselves. Jesus’ cross was the way of Life; our crosses are our ways of Life. Crosses put to death our flesh, our ways, our self-wills so that we are remade after having received His Spirit.

Every Christian soldier has crosswalk scars that show, and testimonies to encourage us along our walks. Those scars are evidence that we have died and risen again to Life. Deaths and resurrections cannot be faked. But do beware of the fakes that come through religion. Religion cannot change a person inwardly, but may make him look changed outwardly. The cross kills the flesh and allows the Spirit of Christ to freely live in and through us. The cross never fails.

1. From A. H.: On the occasion of a very important meeting, a not very godly person asked, “What are your expectations for this meeting?” The subject of the meeting was very personal. I had already handed over its outcome to the Lord, and laid down all expectations. She rather tartly replied, “Is that so you will avoid disappointment?” Despite being nearly caught off guard, I quickly replied, “Absolutely.” That lady made my life very difficult in all of our contacts. However, the Lord achieved His purposes in it all and I was not “disappointed.”

What should be our expectations of one another? Some people can be relied on to keep their word come what may. Those are great to have in our lives. Being human, they will seldomly fail us. Unfortunately, at critical times we are left short by others. Our responses should be three-fold: 1) Keep our peace, 2) reassess our position while choosing plan B, and 3) look for the Lord’s eternal plan in the crash of our temporal plans. Oftentimes He achieves His plan through changed temporal plans through our forbearance of the “offender.”

We know in advance that some others are totally unreliable. They make rash promises and find it easy to break their word, especially if some minor inconvenience is created. These people are probably the easiest to deal with, because we already are dealing with them cautiously.

But there are many somewhere in between the two, so our ability to trust can be dented. We can become hardened in mistrust, against certain ones or everyone. Not a good outcome.

Consider the Lord. We can rely on Him to be absolutely faithful to His word. He is God, so He does only what is right. He never makes mistakes. We can rely on His absolute holiness and unfailing love. Unfortunately, we can attribute our thoughts and hopes to His will and when He does not “come up with the goods” we can place Him on our list of those who let us down, those who disappoint us by coming short of our expectations. Some even get angry with Him. We forget that His ways and thoughts are infinitely higher than ours and are often very different in execution and outcome. Perhaps we need to grow up.

What are the Lord’s expectations for us? He is a holy God, and knows the ends of all things from their beginnings, so cannot be disappointed. He wants us to love Him with all we are and have, and to live out our lives righteously empowered by His Spirit within us. We fail at times, but having already known that and having made all necessary accommodations, He is not surprised or disillusioned. Praise Him! He has made a way for us to be restored through contrition, repentance, and forgiveness through the blood of Jesus.

That which He wants of us varies with our maturity. Moses was barred from entering the promised land for striking the rock a second time rather than speaking to it, as instructed. That may seem like a small detail to us [it was not!] but Moses’ maturity made him responsible for being beyond that simple disobedience. Thanks, A. H.

Moses had walked closely with the Lord for 40 years, but allowed an incident of impatience with people to interfere with his obedience to the Lord. The matter was important to those who would follow in faith [like us] and was being recorded in scripture for our sake [Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11]. Notice that the Lord did not speak badly to Moses, but simply removed him from leadership. Even in his failure, the Lord was kind, using Moses in many future ministry situations – Matt. 17:3; 19:7-8; 23:2; Mark 10:3; 12:19; Luke 16:29; John 3:14; 5:45; 7:19; and many more.

Not only that, but there is no indication that Moses was disappointed when relieved of his leadership position. Moses knew things about the Lord’s nature that we should know, such as that the Lord is never disappointed with us and that He always and immediately makes a way for us. Trust Him that way today, and sleep well tonight.

1. And finally, stay closely knit and listen to the Holy Spirit who will give Christ’s body insight and strength to stand in the day of trial. Remember, “Mit der Dummbeit kampfen Gotter selbst vergebens.”