THOUGHTS of December, 2018

1. This Thought is to strengthen you and those whom you love enough to pass it along in your special way. Jesus is not the Lord of everyone who calls Him Lord – Matt. 7:21-23. He wants to correct that flaw in their/our relationship, the flaw that He calls lawlessness, or iniquity. His tool for correction is our crosses, which we are to pick up daily and follow Him. He customizes the times and places for being nailed to our crosses so that everyone of His disciples can grow. Non-disciples do not take up their crosses daily; they may follow Him somewhat, but that will not get the job done. Freely taking up our crosses, following Him, and then holding still while the enemy nails us is essential. Don’t fear your cross. Jesus did not refer to Himself as the crucifixion and the death, but as the resurrection and the life – John 11:25. Your cross is not the end, but the means to real life; life now and after this earth-death.

Gathering spiritual power apart from the crosswalk is the picture being drawn for us in those verses by Matthew. Spiritual power obtained apart from our crosswalk corrupts us. The church [you, me, all those other scoundrels] lacks spiritual power, which indeed we should seek, but perhaps it should not be sought until we have begun to taste the suffering of our cross and the joy beyond it. That is a difficult restraint to place upon ourselves, especially in the first bloom of the Spirit, but that’s what the love, wisdom and knowledge of the church is for. Preach it, teach it, and display it. Take responsibility for those who fit the pattern in Matthew 7:21-23. Keep your brother, shepherd the Lord’s flock.

1. Humanity was created perfectly clean in soul and flesh. That, and keeping it that way, has always been important.

God’s word to Satan [already a fallen angel] was about Satan’s seed [morally, spiritually and genetically] and Eve’s seed [morally, spiritually and genetically] – Gen. 3:14-15. If Satan could contradict or nullify God’s word on this [or on anything], Satan would be free of God’s judgment and of God. If God’s word could be broken in one case, all of God’s word would fail. Satan would then have accomplished his rebellion and escaped all penalties. See the report on his rebellion in Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:13-19.

Having seen that which Isaiah and Ezekiel saw, it should be asked, “What in the world stirred Satan and a third of the angels to rebellion?” [That’s well said because it was that which was new “in the world” that stirred them.] In the Old Testament, and probably before the Old Testament record began, the angels were “sons of God” – Gen. 6:1-4; etc. God is a Spirit and the angels are spirits created by Him, therefore, sons. Sonship is a high position in God and calls for important functions for God. But the Lord began the process of replacing His angel sons with human sons, whom He intended to be His eventual only sons and heirs. Compare that to the possible conflict among already-adopted children in a family when the parents adopt more children with plans for placing the newly adopted ones above the first. The angels were God’s sons but when God began creating a place for His replacement sons of God, the angels first watched. Some helped; some fretted and schemed. Then they saw that God **Himself!!** even planted a special garden on the special planet for His newly developing special sons – Gen. 2:8!! Envy stirs discontent, especially when we are about to lose what we have, and it mortifies the soul. Have you not noticed?

So, because God said His seed [One from His perfect, “very good” gene pool] would destroy Satan, Satan set out to contaminate the human gene pool with his and other fallen angels’ genes. It was chaos. The gene pool and the whole earth was corrupted – Gen. 6:5-13. But, as always, there was found a remnant. Noah’s genes were pure [Gen. 6:9] and Noah was righteous.

The gene pool was purified by the flood, almost. Apparently, Noah’s son, Ham, had married a girl with contaminated genes. Scripture shows that Ham’s son, Canaan, was evil in genes and soul. Canaan fathered the nations in which were born giants – Gen. 10:6-20.; 2 Pet. 2:4-9.

But, although the Satanic gene pool was continued from human to human, no longer were there evil angel “sires.” They had been locked up in darkness until the time we human sons of God will judge them – Jude 6; 1 Cor. 6:30. Apparently, the satanic genes were recessive so they produced giants only occasionally and less frequently over the centuries. Over time, the contaminated gene pool has been continually diluted and perhaps purged.

The initial work of purging was assigned to the Israelites, who were to destroy all of the humans [and in some cases, animals] in the giant-contaminated nations. That meant they were to destroy everyone – men, women and children. Although the worship of their false gods was to be avoided by God’s chosen people, destruction of the demonic gene pool among humans was the focus. But why kill all of the animals, in some cases? Recall Genesis 3:14-15, then see Revelation 9:all, including Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4. By the time of the tribulation, crossbreeding will also occur between fallen angels and animals [which is also going on in laboratories in our time, but so far without involving demonic genes].

It appears that all angels can mate and produce offspring. See Matthew 22:30. It’s just that all angels have been commanded to not mate, so the obedient ones [being the ones who have continued to abide in heaven] obey the Lord. The disobedient ones of Genesis 6:1-4 are fallen angels and disobey the Lord in many ways.

There are also female angels – Zech. 5:9. So ---?

1. The Lord will do what He will do. He includes us in on so little of that which He does – original thinking, planning, doing foundational work, building upwards, staying on track, finishing, maintaining, enlarging. [If looked at from our human perspective it wrongly seems at times that everything depends on us.] It is good to be part of Him eternally, brought into Him because of Him and not of ourselves, kept by Him and not by ourselves, and going ahead forever with Him – all for, through, and to Him – Rom. 11:36.

Paul closed out that verse with an “Amen.” Our sons of God “Amens” do not make God’s words and works happen, but they do express our agreement with Him, some degree of its present accomplished reality to us, and offers us to Him for alignment with the purpose of those words. In those ways we become co-workers with Him, with the One who needs no help. He is growing a God-appropriate family, for which we are decreasing and He is increasing in us. The world around us is steadily decreasing, not yet increasing, but the time of its final decreasing is drawing near. Its labor pains are inevitable and will be productive. All is so obvious to those who know and believe the story. We are being conformed to His image and the world to His plan. Our God-tailored cross situations will reduce us to Christ, giving the Lord [and us] what we are looking for.

1. Read Psalm 35:11-20; 38:19 (b); and 69:1-4. The theme of those verses is that David was again asking for the Lord’s help against his enemies, but on this occasion, he narrowed his pool of enemies down to one type – those who wrongly rejoiced over him, who hated him without cause, who hated him wrongly, who were wrongfully his enemies. That problem occurs in everyone’s lives, and the Lord Jesus gave us some instructions and His example on how to handle it, using David and Himself as examples for us.

David’s response to those baseless charges was to restore to his accusers that which he did not steal – 69:4 (c). That is extreme, is it not? It is not logical, and is not reasonable or necessary! But disciples see the situation, recognize it as an opportunity in their calling, pick up their crosses, and follow Jesus. David’s benevolent act could have appeared to the crude to be confirmation that David was the culprit. Jesus’ own example shows that David was on the right track – John 15:25 (18-27). He went all the way, giving Himself into the appropriate punishment for the crime for which He was charged – death, for calling Himself God, equal with God, the Son of God, the Messiah – when He had committed no crime.

1. Are you free to review your failures – remote, recent, present, and pending? If penitence is one of your righteous strong points, you do that often because you have been forgiven and changed. What of your remorse when it is time for one of those “annual Passover” times? The Lord still has Israel reviewing their Egyptian bondages, although they have long been well-delivered. Their annual remembrance is a celebration of His power and love and continuous presence and their great future.

That is offered to Christians, also. Times alone with the Lord are special occasions for celebration. But have you noticed that a third person comes for his own purposes? The deceiver comes to condemn and to destroy our joy and peace, to replace them with “at least a reasonable sense of failure and condemnation,” especially if we have recurrent sins. [And we do.] But the deceiver is limited, small, and only speaks lies. We are now in Christ our Redeemer and the redeemer of all of our forgiven situations. Remember that, often. Don’t be reluctant to review your past, don’t run from your record. It has been erased from your book in heaven. They can be reviewed as facts but no longer sins against God or man. There is no longer the possibility of condemnation. That’s a good reason to get alone with the Lord for “Passover” celebrations. Be alone with Him, or make it a group celebration.

1. Our enemy’s main weapon is religion. That is a companion sentence to, “The main enemy of ‘perfect’ is ‘good.’” One need not be a student of the Bible to know that the main human enemies of Jesus were the Jewish religious leaders, not the Romans and not the rank unbelievers. Simple words such as, “God does not live in man-made temples,” or actions like raising the dead, set the religious leaders on hellfire and moved them to murder.

Don’t try to separate yourself from the world; just don’t be a part of it. Don’t copy it, don’t compromise with it. None of us are perfect in anything, so don’t be discouraged when you and other believers fail. We are on a course in this world whose schedule and direction are set by the Lord, not us. Don’t get caught in the trap of living in this world and going to church. Instead, live in the church and go out into the world. Feed on the abundant heavenly manna, Jesus.

I have a dear brother who gets depressed when he recognizes more and more of Satan’s presence and activity in the church. Learn from Job [Satan was there with God in heaven] and Jesus [always bashing Satan but never ridding Israel of him]. Jesus came to rescue His people from Satan, but not now. He left it to us to subdue Satan among the church. Currently it is God’s plan to include Satan’s presence among us, the church and the world. You can see that invisible spirit at work causing trouble, unbelief, divisions, etc. It is the business of us, God’s family, to command Satan to be still and to limit him. We, too, are not to eliminate him, but to do that which we are given to be Christ’s body, not a division of Him.

You have noticed that when Satan is ignored, he does not go away or call time-out. His every manifestation is to be encountered with words [spoken!] by the faithful, loving, united, informed, unafraid ones. That describes you and me, and my dear brother of the above paragraph.

1. Male and female love is displayed differently; they also vary from culture to culture, but only a bit. Males want to possess, then protect and provide for those whom/that which they possess. Females want to give themselves, to be loved and possessed, then to nourish the ongoing results. That’s good.
2. Isn’t it absolutely wonderful when another trial comes! [**NOT!]** Even when we recognize it as the devil working against us and the Lord growing us up, it is still difficult, but only on our flesh. Nancy’s usual counsel to those who tend to sit in their mess instead of getting up and going forward is, “So what!” The choice is between better or bitter. The sooner we get our eyes off of our belly buttons and process through the customized process, the less the pain, the better the trip, and more blessed the results.

James and the Holy Spirit were experts in processing. They wrote, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials [temptations], knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance [steadfastness]. And let endurance have its perfect result [work], so that you may be perfect [mature] and complete, lacking in nothing” – Jam. 1:2-4. Notice the tremendous pay-off – perfect, complete, lacking nothing. It may be somewhat of a personal improvement [but not victory] while we obey the Lord although grinding our teeth in resentment, but not to worry. The Lover of our souls will not abandon us. He will return with another similarly purposed opportunity. We are His workmanship. The enemy will again be used as a tool to make us “perfect, complete, lacking nothing.”

Isn’t it good to have fallen into the hands of the Lord – Job 1:20-22; 2:9-10; 13:14-15; Luke 23:46. He already sees the finished project and rejoices, He doesn’t have to wait until the end before He knows the outcome, and neither do we. Right there in the trial we know the results: perfect, complete, lacking nothing. Relax.

1. One additional thing to say here about having fallen into the hands of the Lord, is that we are taught that it helps if we pursue Him. I focus more on Him choosing us and rescuing us than on our choosing Him, but I don’t have that all ironed out and fully understood. I don’t see that I contributed to my salvation. In my flesh, I can say that I was saved because I chose to choose Him. According to Jeremiah 29:13, some people do not find Him because they do not know that they desperately need Him so they don’t have the desire or availability to seek Him with all of their hearts. My testimony is that I was in a dry place, doing my own thing, but panting and ignorantly thirsting for Him; and He rescued me.
2. You observant ones have noticed that humans are easy to lead and hard to drive. Do you function by that observation at work, in your family and church life, with your friends? At times I find myself slipping into the alternative, the command mode. It may be soft and benevolent, but it is still some degree of command. Not all command mode is bad, especially the more godly is the commander. God issues commandments, and He is perfect. In His perfection, He also offers us options, including disobedience with chastisement.
3. The church’s ongoing defense [yes, unfortunately, “defense”] on things like homosexuality, promiscuity, abortion, gender identity, and most basic issues over the past 50 years has been based on what is “better,” what is “traditional,” and what is “more reasonable.” As a result, our arguments have failed. Debating on that level make us just another secular group, where the best spoken and loudest voice wins.

Biblical Christians living in a secular culture are caught without any authority when the church relies upon secular reasoning. [I will call it secularism, but the real problem is unbelief.] Early-on, we dominated for a while but our brief dominance succeeded at the expense of the Truth, and we have verified the dominance of the heresy of secularism! We have removed God’s word and concepts from the battle for strictly utilitarian reasons, which reveals our unfaithfulness. This is why we have lost the cultural war. Why, oh why, do we reject our cultural source – God’s word by His Spirit?! It is not a battle over feelings, desires, and social cohesion, and not even over traditional Judeo-Christian values, but over our Creator God’s revealed will. If it is logic that we want, ask yourself why we cut ourselves off from our true and only Source of logic when we go to battle!

There was a time when we knew that the Lord was with us. That changed us and then the world. We trusted Him, His word, His power, His love, and we [He] prevailed. That deepened the awesome reality of His presence and approval. In time, reliance upon creedal truths and selected theologies [instead of Jesus Himself and His whole word], left us with deeply religious and perfected liturgies and worship wherein we focused on what liturgies and worship do for us rather than what they are.

So, why continue fighting a losing battle to reclaim our Christian culture? Our help will come from the Lord as we love one another [Really!] and dedicate ourselves completely to the Lord Jesus and His full word. Ultimately, He and we have to recreate a culture that will actually replace secularism. But, in the interest of theological balance, we are not here to create a new world culture here and now, but to reveal the kingdom of God that is coming [which will certainly impact the current secularism]. For us to reveal that coming kingdom, we must offer ourselves to the Lord to be persecuted by the currently prevailing kingdom of this world.

1. Yes, Jesus did urge them to believe in Him, but the real offer and test was for them to follow Him. There were many who believed in Him [Mary, Martha and Lazarus, for example] as much as was given anyone [including His disciples] to believe about Him at that time of His gradually increasing revelation, but few followed Him. And, on the contrary, Judas followed Him but did not believe in [into] Him. Jesus invited disciple-type people to follow Him, and left the door open for anyone else to believe and/or follow Him. He turned none away who wanted to follow. Believing took all forms and degrees, but following Him required exactly that – following Him. Today, believing in Him still has all shades and degrees [accepting Him, joining a church, being labeled Christian], but the test of real belief is shown by following Him.
2. When we think of wisdom, we usually define it as learned, judicious, and knowledgeable. That’s close. Then we remember that King Solomon was the wisest man in the world after he asked the Lord for wisdom, and received it, and showed it [until he got old]. This Thought is about what scripture says, that Solomon asked for and received from the Lord an understanding heart, or listening heart, so he could discern between good and evil – 1 Kings 3:9.

Recall Genesis 2:9; 3:3-6 about the sin of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the resulting curse. There is a vast difference between having an understanding, listening heart so one can discern between good and evil, and having the knowledge of good and evil. The first describes a yieldedness and hunger for and a fellowship with God in one who knows that the most supreme human mind is inadequate. The second describes the person to whom knowledge is supreme, who believes that he or humanity can do anything including lift themselves up by their own bootstraps. The first is humble and submitted to God; the second is self-sufficient and arrogant. The first is tuned in to the heavenly wavelength and receives understanding from the Infinite Source of understanding; the second is listening to the best that humanity has or can devise ASAP. The first knows that God is alive, talking and working for and through us; the second knows that it needs to work harder because “we can do it.” Therein is the ongoing battle of the Spirit against the flesh.

One current application of understanding and listening has to do with current events in the cosmos, world, and locally. If we are listening, we have received understanding. Known events are leading to the beginning of personal and social life as have never before been known or happened. The wise [those who are listening and understanding] are ready for the transition.

1. How are you handling the fact [even a thought] that you are not going to be perfect when you leave this world? Are you still “working on it?” Our project is actually to grow in faith according to the working of our Potter, the Workman of our souls, the Lord. And, we are not going to be perfected in this lifetime no matter who is working on us. Faith is the victory, not behavior. [Now breathe deeply].

Whew; that was difficult to say, especially for us who value behavior so highly. Perfectionists live a hard life. We know the verses but don’t want to relax [in faith] so the Lord can accomplish that which He plans from one person to another, and one age to the other – Eph. 2:7. It is difficult for us to appreciate and accept the grace and kindness afforded us now, partly because we don’t believe this and many other good news expressions of the Lord.

If spiritual perfection is not to be accomplished in this [church] age, then what is attainable? We are a work in progress, so what is the present work, and how is the progress? What are the few steps out of darkness that we should take? Could it be something like spiritual maturity, learning to walk with the Lord and to hear His voice, learning to trust Him no matter the process or outcome, or perhaps learning that “being comes before doing?” Surely something of growth is expected with the God-customized time and situations we have? Something has to happen so we can go from milk to meat. How about knowing Jesus Christ, not just being introduced to Him and believing that He exists?

Spiritual maturity is our present goal in this age, and spiritual perfection is our ultimate goal in the ages to come. Christ being formed in us is the goal [we are becoming less of ourselves and He is becoming more of Himself in us]. We are His workmanship only [relax, keep your peace, trust and obey Him]. That describes something of God’s goal for us in this age. When we have fallen into His hands and learned to relax, we are on His way. Our soul and mind go, “Oh, now I see!” when we hear Joseph [Gen. 50:20] saying, “You meant it for evil against me but God meant it for good.” Evil things, things forced upon us, things we don’t enjoy doing, all those can be embraced and accepted when we understand God’s reason for them being in our lives. All things work for good for those who know the Lord and are focused on Him – [an adaptation of Romans 8:28].

1. It looks like Brazil has turned a common corner, like several other countries in South America. It has committed to stop America-bashing, is pursuing rapprochement with Israel, and has repudiated Venezuela’s socialistic/communistic course. That shows a deep change of heart and mind, away from the god-state’s total supply and total control to the limited government’s personal freedom and self-responsibility. Shades of a wise and early reversal of Brazil’s former slide into 1 Samuel 8, in which Venezuela is still mired! Brazil looked at Venezuela’s choices and results, tasted it carefully, and has said, “No, thanks!” That took wisdom and courage. Venezuela had taken the baited hook, was reeled in, filleted, and is now in the frying pan – Num. 16. Sin always offers us something that looks good to our horizonal vision – Gen. 3:1-7.
2. Now, where did I put my horn? Oh, here it is. “TOOT!” Gallup has come out with another poll, showing how Americans rank various professions according to honesty and ethical standards. The top three spots were taken by health professionals – nurses, physicians, and pharmacists, in that order. Then came police officers [5], clergy [8], journalists [9], bankers [12], lawyers [15], car salesmen [20], and members of congress [21]. What have we and they done to deserve our ranking? And were the rankings accurate for you?
3. Let’s start with this Thought by applying it to the Christmas Story. The Thought is, “The Lord does not do every good thing that we ask of Him, nor the billions of other “good” things per each second that He could do.” Examples:
4. Mary was an unwed, righteous, reputable teenager. The angel’s message [Luke 1 & 2] destroyed her reputation, made her the target of gossip in a small town, threw dirt on Jesus’ ministry [John 8:41], required that she deliver her first child in a stable, made the family refugees and residents in Egypt, slaughtered the town’s infants as their praying, pleading parents watched helplessly, and many other not-good things that did not seem to fit the nature, actions, or promises to those who trust and obey Him. He is always good, but good according to His long-range knowledge of and plans for what makes for goodness.
5. The survivors of the slaughter of God’s people in Jerusalem and Israel were taken into slavery in Babylon. They were humiliated among themselves and by their owners. They had no way to worship their God – the temple was destroyed, the priesthood was disbanded, and they had no life or future. Some were trying and advising all sorts of things, including prayer, escape, rebellion, and whatever. There was one, the prophet Jeremiah who had been left in Israel, who wrote to the captives, “Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce, take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. Seek the welfare of the city where I [God – ed.] have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare” – Jer. 29:5-7. They really did not like that “advice.” They were God’s people! Jehovah was a great God; He had done great things before and He could do great things again. They rejected Jeremiah’s message because it did not fit His nature, actions, or promises to those who trust and obey Him. Their problem: They did not know that their God has eternal vision and eternal actions. Their and our flesh is “now” oriented.
6. Then there is us. We look about us and see terrible things going on in and out of the church. We pray, we speak up, and we live our own lives in significant trust and obedience to the Lord [careful there, Bob]. But nothing changes except that things get worse! Where is the All-mighty God who is reported to be all loving, all powerful, and all-everything good? Bad things are happening to His people, and He has not changed [some of] them even though we asked. It seems that He has failed us. His nature, actions, and promises seem to have failed. “What in heaven is going on here on earth?!”

It is not for the faithful to be dismayed. Rest for a while on Job’s testimony that he would trust the Lord even though the Lord might slay him – Job 13:15. Notice in the Hall of Faith [Hebrews 11] that they all died in faith without receiving the promises of God [v.13]. In fact, they were scourged, imprisoned, stoned, sawn in two, destitute, ill-treated, and had to live in caves and holes in the ground [vv. 35-38]. They did not receive God’s promises [v. 39]. Why? As with Jesus Himself, the plan called for their living for others’ sakes [v. 40].

So how does all of that pertain to us? We have the same God, the same promises, and we are in God’s same plan – living by faith now so that others [and ourselves] can receive later the greater promises. We are still being told that the Lord has only good planned for us, but we don’t see much of the truth of that promise when we view life by our natural senses. We read that all things have been subjected to Him, put under His feet, leaving nothing that is not subject to Him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to Him – Heb. 2:8. But we see Jesus, the trailblazer of the Way that we follow. The only way to follow Him through this wilderness is to follow Him no matter what, knowing that all things have been put under His feet, and time will show it.

1. I had a very enjoyable, “uncle-to-nephew” type of conversation over Christmas dinner with a young man who dropped the thought that he was about to seriously pursue a wife. He had no particular girl in sight, but was about to start the search. How did you guess that I offered him some advice? My spontaneously organized outline:
2. You want a girl who loves you, and simply. You will get a hint of this on your first date, noticing that she is not distracted by others and things, but is focused on being with you. She will be with you. Your other dates will be like they are on a tour and you have come along. This is more important than you might imagine. It shows a host-focus vs. a self-focus.
3. She should be warm and soft of body and soul. This is important because in relationships she must be understanding, patient, and able to absorb. Warm and soft of body and soul indicates that she is understanding [if not, she is patient] and absorbable of life’s crudeness, without splitting. That will enable her to return good for bad from you and others; beauty for trash. Keep this one.
4. This choosing of a wife is the second most important decision of your life. Loving her begins now, before you have laid your eyes on her. Leave where you now live, move to a small town in the country [real country], and get a job in the local feed store. The girl you want will drive up in her father’s pickup, not her mom’s Lexus – and it was her choice.
5. Understand and accept this early: Do not try to find a girl who is like your mom. If you try, eventually you will be disappointed. Your mom is justifiably on that pedestal where you and God placed her, and there is no copy of her. You are searching for the one for you; AKA the Lord’s choice.
6. Don’t marry a beauty queen, or one who thinks she is. If you do, it will not be long until you shrink in her view of you as she wonders how much better she could have done than she did by marrying you.
7. If you think your search will be endless and fruitless if you follow these suggestions, you are wrong. The search will be worth the time and alertness you dedicate to it. The Lord already has His eye on her, and on you for her. He doesn’t have to search; you just stay on track.

As I often say to you, my readers, “I know you.” In this Thought, I know that you have properly spiritualized those bits of advice, and realize their value in the natural and spiritual. Pass them on.

1. It’s Christmas day, the day we celebrate Christ’s coming to us as a gift of His Father to creation. The gift may not be appreciated in its fullness until Easter day after He has been fully given for us and we “see” it. Like Abraham offered up to God his son, Isaac, because of his love for God, our Father in heaven offered up His Son, Jesus, because of His love for us – John 3:16. By offering up His only Son, He has given us everything of His Son – His sonship, His possessions, His inheritance, His love, etc. “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things” – Rom. 8:32? That’s a very full “Merry Christmas!”
2. From the beginning, the Lord has required the shed blood of animal sacrifice if anyone wanted to approach Him and be accepted by Him. The slaying of the animal had to be done in faith in God’s grace and mercy, or it would not be efficacious in God’s eyes. The slaying of the innocent, substitutionary animal was then adequate for the forgiving of sins and cleansing of the sinner. When the real Innocent Substitutionary came, the animals were no longer needed – Jesus Christ, the lamb of God, is fully adequate. The temple priests were no longer needed – all believers are priests. The temple was no longer needed – the temple is us. The Law was no longer over us – God’s word is written on our hearts. You know that all of those changes are written in the New Testament record, but I will add Colossians 2:17 and Hebrews 10:1. Hallelujah!
3. In Matthew 5:16, when Jesus used the term “good works,” he was not referring to church work, or giving of money or property, but of the showing forth of Christ’s character and righteousness by the Holy Spirit. He was not placing us back under the Law.
4. Aaron, the first high priest, had sons who succeeded him in the priesthood. They were to begin their priestly duties at the age of 30 – Num. 4:3. The Word of God held Himself to His own word – Luke 3:23.
5. I have been asked to say something about covenants. Most basically: Through Christ, in our covenant with Him, believers have been covenanted with the world. We did not do it; He did. All mankind are our brothers in respect to our being a worldwide human family. We should act like family. Through His calling, we too are called. No, everyone is not our Christian brother, or our American brother, or our white brother, or any of our other sub-brothers, but in Christ we are brothers [and neighbors] with everyone. As Jesus was sent into the world, so are we. Part of the meaning of “as” is that we are sent with the same purpose and equipment as was He.

Mostly we think only of our few and important covenants such as marriage, children, kindred, church congregation, jobs, and the like. The next thought may be that we do not really have covenants beyond those; but we do. We have covenant with every person, because of the Covenant Maker with whom we have been covenanted. If you are interested in living a transformed life beyond “being good,” ask the Lord to show you that He has covenanted you to everyone on the planet. Whosoever comes into your life is received from God’s hand, and you will not turn them away; you are ready to lay down your life for them [time, place, possessions, self].

1. Here is another thing that we don’t believe, but should, because it is true: “Of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” – John 1:16. That leaves nothing of Him out. a) The “His” is Jesus. Jesus is the full expression of God. b) “His fullness” is everything Jesus is. How full is full? c) “We” is believers. d) “All” is all believers. Does that leave any of us out? e) “Have all” shows that it has been accomplished for every believer. Now it is for us to abide in Him, not trying to re-inter our birth process over and over, or think that this verse and many others do not apply to me.
2. As hard as many saints may pray for and join in the political scene to bring Life to the nation, real spiritual improvement is often thin or fleeting. The “.. If my people ..” of 2 Chronicles 7:14 tells us that the answers to a nation’s problems do not come with politics but with God’s people who are called by His name. The Lord is working to change politicians, doctors, preachers, and all types, but He says He will start by changing those who are His. When His people change, He will change the nation. If politics are our rally point we may get change but not necessarily for the better.
3. The Seed has been planted [He has gone into the ground and come forth with Life], the crop is growing and developing all over the world [first the blade, then the head, then the full head], and the Harvester is coming soon [when the grain has ripened He will come] – Mark 4:26-29. The process is irresistible. Another burst of the Lord into His creation is about to occur. We will soon be experiencing the next stage of the end of all things as they have been -- His nearer-the-end results. Are you ready for your contribution to His labors to be gathered at the harvest? I am, because one component of being ready is being ready to cast ourselves upon His grace and mercy because we did nothing ourselves.
4. Have you ever blamed anyone for your mistakes? Of course not! How about having blamed God? In Proverb 19:3 it is said, “The foolishness of man ruins his way, and his heart rages against the Lord.” In other words, “Man makes mistakes, then he blames God.” In those situations God can use the weather, another vehicle’s driver, or some other “bad luck.” Better to acknowledge the Lord’s fruit-producing hand in the matter. The fruit? Praise, honesty, insight, repentance, growth.
5. Temptation is differently received and variously effective from person to person. Someone who has little and well controlled self-desires or self-will or self-focus does well when tempted. The contrary person is more vulnerable to temptation. Jesus had a high level of resistance to temptation, and that came to perfection in John 14:30. During the maturation process, the Lord knows how to protect His sheep – 1 Cor. 10:13.
6. We, the one body of Christ, are in trouble. Our enemy heard that we have been granted the authority and power of Jesus Christ, and that a few of us were using it. On closer inspection he observed that we are also broken and anemic, so has been mistreating and deceiving us. Now he has heard that his time on earth is limited, that soon he is going to jail for a well-deserved 1,000-year sentence – Rev. 20:2-3. That means things will get even worse for a short time before then, so be prepared. We need to use our most effective weapons – faith, love, patience, hope and the others that you have been practicing with. They are all effective, so don’t quit the fight when you hear his roar.
7. The Lord is good at building up our expectations. He knows and controls what is ahead and wants to have His people ready for all things. Israel had been destroyed. His people had been given over to captivity in Babylon and thought they were enslaved forever, although some thought they could and should do something about it themselves.

Both ideas were wrong. The Lord had Jeremiah write a general letter to them, in which He told His people to settle down, build houses for themselves, resume their Jewish culture, raise families, plant gardens, be a blessing to their captors [including pray for them], and to not be distracted by other, contrary Jewish prophets. He added that they would be out of there in 70 years – Jer. 11:1-14. That created enough accurate expectations among a few of them that a small percentage obeyed. Those and their families were ready to leave on God’s schedule, with the heathen king’s very necessary blessing.

Expectancy is good preparation even if we don’t have all of our information correct. When John the Baptist came onto the scene in Israel, many thought he was the Messiah [Luke 3:15], which he had to deny while continuing stirring their expectancy. But the expectancy of the people was important for timing. The Messiah was indeed already there, and eventually some recognized Him as Jesus of Nazareth.

All creatids have expectations of their Creator, unless they have settled for life and its circumstances as is. When we learn that our Creator is superb, loves us, and has made promises to us, our expectations [faith plus information] increase. It is difficult to grasp, but all of creation, not only humans but all creation, groans and strains for that which the Creator has ahead for it – Rom. 8:22 (18-23). I have been with faithful, biblically informed friends and family as they died, they speaking eagerly of their soon-to-be-fulfilled expectations.

So, this being the timely season to warm up our expectations for another year, let’s give some thought to that which we should reasonably expect in 2019. I will give some structure to it. What do you expect of the Lord in 2019 for: 1) The outer universe? 2) The near universe? 3) In this world? 4) In your nation? 5) In your near family? 6) In your local church group or congregation? 7) In yourself?

There is a time for everything, so we can and should be expectant about many things that will happen, things that are found in and out of the Bible. Set goals for yourself. If you are reluctant to do that this year [again!], perhaps you should ask help from those close to you – from among those many who dearly love you, and perhaps you can ask someone who doesn’t adore you. for almost 2,000 years worldwide Jewry said, “Next year, Jerusalem.” Now they are in Jerusalem. So, be encouraged.