THOUGHTS OF MAY, 2014

1. In what has been called “a unique instance of ‘common sense and logical consistency,’” the Alabama Supreme Court has ruled that the word “child” includes “unborn child” and as such has “inalienable” right to life “at all stages of development.” The justice system may be coming back to common sense, the dictionary, and the King’s language, which for the most part have held steady with Scripture. Might that be an indication that we are in the beginning of a spiritual renewal that is first showing in the marketplace of our courts?

2. Laboring in the kingdom requires both intense activity and diligent patience. [In this Thought diligent patience is considered to be the appearance of inactivity, neglect, or unconcern as in John 11:6.]. Both require endurance. Both are evidence of functional faith. Both activity and patience “see” God’s hand at work and may even see His grand plan while it is processing to fruition, although invisible to the natural eye. That’s faith in action while the Holy Spirit is processing things. Patience draws its confidence from faith. Faith is seeing invisible reality.

Example: We [sometimes] are patient while waiting for the pot to come to boil – if we know that the power is on. If we are unsure of the power we may hover, murmur, fret, or completely abandon the project. It helps our patience if we know we have done our part, such as by plugging the pot into the power source. If all is in place, patience flows easily. Persistent patience is endurance, which shows maturity and produces more faith.

3. Because we are a kingdom of priests and kings [having authority before God on behalf of the earth, and authority on the earth on behalf of God], we understand things that others do not. Yet, there are many things we do not understand. In those cases we may hold ourselves in abeyance until we perceive more, then act. Sometimes we faithfully proceed, but slowly as if driving in a fog on the expressway. And other times [those times when we have more vision or Holy Spirit urging] we press ahead despite shortages and opposition.

That is meant to describe the various ways and degrees the Lord shows us things. He deliberately conceals many things from us as a means of developing kingly character – Prov. 25:2. Kings search for, discover and reveal things to others that the Lord had hidden. God’s kings have been appointed to science, the military, business, civil positions, the professions, homemaking and child care, etc. We search for, find, and properly use that which the Lord has created, then search for more.

All of earth’s problems have God’s solutions. His marketplace kings are on search, reveal and use missions. Remember that Jesus, our High Priest and King, rarely spoke from a pulpit. He was usually in the marketplace to search for the lost and to reveal [lost and hidden] treasures, including truth. He dealt with farming, financial, health, family and business souls and matters, not only the religious.

4. God is good; always and everywhere. He is the all-mighty architect and builder of each of our souls and lives, meaning that we are His handiwork – Eph. 2:10. He brings us into bright and cheerful places, and into dark and dry places. In every case He gives us grace to abide faithfully. The other side of the story is that we don’t want to believe it is the Lord when we get into dark and dry places. That means “if it is painful [physically, financially, emotionally] it is not from the Lord” [WRONG] but “if it feels good it is from Him” [again WRONG]. Preachers and teachers have not well-prepared the church for perceiving the Lord’s hand during times of trial, persecution and other hardships in our present wilderness, so our responses are usually to resist that which is God’s purpose in those circumstances. As a result, …

5. … although our fathers in their own wilderness a) had the covering/leading cloud by day and illuminating/protecting pillar of fire by night, b) had passed through the sea of separation from sin into Life, c) had all fed on the manna from heaven, and d) had all drank of the water of life, God was not pleased with most of them. Thus most of them, although they were God’s people, died at His hand in the wilderness – 1 Cor. 10:1-5.

Lest we think less than we should of those people [that church in their wilderness – Acts 7:38] and what they went through, verses 6 and 11 say that those things happened as examples for us. It does not say that we can stand back from them, pointing our fingers, using those events and people as negative examples, but that they happened for our sakes so that we would not make the same mistakes. They and those events were God-created examples which were recorded for our instruction, because we [this church in our wilderness] are the purpose of the ages. We are God’s human reason for creation and all that He has done and recorded in Scripture, archeology, etc. Yes, it is all for Jesus’ sake but we are in Him, His brothers and body. And the culmination of all things, the end of the earth as we know it, is at hand.

Let us look at verses 7 through 10, comparing them to the verses in Moses’ writings that are referenced here in 1 Corinthians 10:

 Prefacing with verse 6 – They craved evil things. What were those evil things? Moses recorded them for us in Numbers 11. The evil things were things other than those Jehovah had provided. He miraculously provided manna and water every day. They wanted fish, melons, cucumbers, leeks, onions and garlic like they had when in slavery back in Egypt. No dietician would fault desire for a fish, melon and vegetable diet. It’s great and complete. But it was not God’s provision for them at that time. So, since they wanted something different, the Lord gave them quail. The least amount of quail anyone gathered [hoarded] was 110 bushels – Num. 11:32. They were not only self-centered and rebellious, but were gluttonous. “Who knows? Jehovah may not provide meat next week!” The grand result was that all who ate quail died. They craved things that ordinarily were good to desire, but in their present situation their craving was in discontent and distrust. Their physical death compares to our spiritual death as we do the same.

Putting it in the positive: We have learned to be content in whatever our circumstances, mixing godliness with genuine contentment even when we have nothing but food and clothing – Phil. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:8; Heb. 13:5.

 V. 7 – Some of them were idolaters. It is remarkable that the Scripture record [out of Ex. 32:1-6] tells us that “The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.” How [apparently] harmless that sounds! Their leader, Moses, had disappeared up the mountain. They thought themselves suddenly leaderless in a terrible place, a few million people in a desert wilderness. They did a very “reasonable” thing; they reverted to the worship of the gods they had worshiped in Egypt. Moses was gone, Jehovah was silent and “absent,” so they needed something “tangible” to depend on, something they could see and believe in, something to place their hopes in, something that had “worked before.” Wouldn’t that be o. k., especially if they continued worshiping Jehovah!? So, the next morning they had a church picnic and worshiped Jehovah [too]. They covered all their worship-bases, which then cost them the lives of 3,000 men. Their idolatry reminds us of our spiritual death when we depend upon/worship gods other than or in addition to the Lord. He wants to 1) separate us from our gods, 2) then put us in a tough place, 3) and then prove Himself the Almighty [if we will not run back to our ex-gods]. They celebrated not being alone and without, being greatly relieved that they had backups in their distress.

Putting it in the positive: We have abandoned our idols, meaning we have ceased sinful indulgences and avoided excesses. Now we can enjoy all things provided in our present condition because all things were created by our God for our proper use – 1 Tim. 4:4.

 V. 8 – Some were immoral; in this case, sexually immoral. The cost to the body of believers [again, the church in their wilderness] was 23,000 deaths in one day – Num. 25:1-5. The Lord acted quickly and sternly. He had Israel’s top leaders slay all of the men under their command who had been immoral. The church leaders were obedient to God’s word and acted openly and quickly. The church was clean again. In our days, when the church accepts God’s definitions and instructions, justice and virtue reign.

To say it simply and positively, when we use our gumption and obey the Lord life goes well for us.

 V. 9 – They “tried the Lord.” That means they knew they were God’s people and used their personal position as God’s kids to try to pressure Him into doing something they wanted. Their problem was that they were tired of the manna and wanted a change of diet, again. It was like, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread,” or “Worship me and this world will be yours,” or “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from this pinnacle and God will protect you” – Luke 4:1-13. Jesus’ final answer to those temptations was, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” That can be said as, “Don’t even go there!” We can test the Lord by the way we drive, or eat, or watch TV – all simple things that are fine to do, but dangerous to do contrary to spiritual gumption. [I had not used that word for years, so am practicing it.]

When Israel complained about their situation [and spoke against God and their leader, Moses] “the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died” – Num. 21:4-9. Presumptuousness can spring from familiarity, can it not? It is good that we can presume upon committed others for help of all sorts. But, consider the presumptuousness of whining children, who pressure their parents for something. A neighbor kid would not use that approach to those kids’ parents because they are not in the privileged position which would allow them to presume.

To put it positively: The Lord, who easily divides between righteousness and unrighteousness, stands ready to help us do the same – Heb. 4:12-16. He will lead us out of self-centeredness into Christ-centeredness.

 V. 10 – A similar route to becoming “not well-pleasing” to the Lord is through complaining, murmuring and rebellion against authority. Those things are more serious than we think. It’s not necessary to start an armed rebellion because rebellion does not need to be physical. We can be actively engaged in rebellion by thoughts and words and actions against elected leaders whom we dislike even in a democracy [all of whom have been established by God – Rom. 13:1-7]. In this example, Korah’s rebellion, we are shown that murmuring makes things worse. We can humbly oppose leadership without developing an attitude of rebellion – Acts 4:18-20. Rebellion leads to spiritual death, even if we win the debate/argument/rebellion.

In Korah’s case, he tried to face-down Moses – Num. 16:1-3, 31-33. Korah was a prominent leader among God’s people. He had a lot of co-rebels backing him – 250 leaders, chosen men of renown! He told Moses that Moses thought too much of himself [actually, Korah thought too little of Moses and too much of himself], that every one of God’s people had their own personal relationship with God [true, but office-calling was the problem here], that the Lord was with them as a special body of believers [again true, but the kingdom of God was not, is not and will never be a democracy. They had the majority but again the majority was wrong. They had a King who had appointed leadership for them.], and that Moses had exalted himself above the assembly [Moses had actually tried that at age 40. It took the Lord 40 more years to deliver Moses from self-exaltation. Then God appointed him to lead.].

To say it positively, the Lord loves us personally and in every intimate way. He works diligently to teach us to trust and honor Him in every difficult situation, and to accept only His attractions, which are many. I have noticed that He is very patient.

And just to think! The Lord put His people Israel through all of that for our sakes. Many of them died off in their wilderness experience. They went through all of that so we would live and thrive and become overcomers in our present lifelong wilderness on earth, and in our occasional special smaller ones. We are being watched by those witnesses, at least by the successful ones.

6. The Jewish rabbis had lots to learn from the young, itinerant, uneducated rabbi from Nazareth -- meaning things to unlearn, some to change a bit, and some to change a lot. Some of those things were attitudes and approaches to the Torah, much of which had been learned at the feet of top scholars, and most had deep traditional and biblical roots from Moses’ time and beyond. But this Jesus was a nobody from nowhere; they were somebodys and where headed somewhere in their profession. They had their God-assigned ministries. So what prevented their learning from the Nobody who was the most perfect rabbi?

On the everyday level we can bundle the answers into one; it was their preconceived notions. Preconceived thoughts locked the door to truth, wisdom and [most certainly] to change. Yes, we know that it was a spiritual matter, that the devil had closed their minds to the truth, and that despite the human and spiritual blockage their blindness was and is God’s plan – Rom. 11. But on the self-responsibility level, we must avoid rejection of “more of God” in any area. We have much to learn and it may come from a young upstart, someone “without papers” and without position.

7. Question: How do you connect good intentions with sound actions? Foundational level answer: You will never know unless you have learned to say “No” in the face of real and supposed need. Living with and failing in the condition of being needful is vital to everyone. That has not only to do with our own problems, but with the needs of [some sometimes, not all always] others who need to endure need. I first think of our kids, whom in the best of our parental love but lack of wisdom and godly love we do not want to suffer in any way, so we do all sorts of unwise and unloving things to avoid or stop neediness in their lives. Saying “no” to others in need also applies to others, at times.

Disclaimer: Be generous, but learn to say “No” to many needs. That includes finances, prayer, etc. assistance. If you are like me, and I know you are, you will have to work through some guilt and self-condemnation while learning to listen to the Holy Spirit instead of focusing only on the need at hand.

8. For years I have been careful to say to Bible classes/studies and counselees that they are not to take what I say as being pure and holy as from the Lord, just because I said it.

[Yes, I did say to some that they were to believe that what I said was from the Lord, because they were very disabled spiritually and emotionally, and I was with them full-time 24/7 to walk with them through their budding true faith in the Lord. They were to believe that He had appointed me as His full-time covering during their disability, just as I had accepted that responsibility for myself. But that was designed to gradually come to an end as they learned to stand before the Lord on their own, usually a process taking weeks to months.]

But I have often repeated to all others that I do not want them to believe what I say simply because I said it. If it is something new or difficult to accept, I encourage them to first be sure they are hearing accurately what I said, and then work on whether it is the truth or currently applicable to them. God and His words have considerable time, place, and person variability. We are the presenters and the Holy Spirit is the Convicter. [In my medical practice a second opinion was “the convicter.”] Perhaps that is easier to understand in the matter of prophetic statements to individuals, who really do need to hear the Lord for themselves when they are offered a prophetic word.

That’s similar to the times when Jesus told his “students” that if they had ears to hear His words, they should – Matt. 13:9, 43. I suppose that many of the others took under advisement what He had said, digested it as able, and grew into it sooner or later.

9. If you are tired of hearing me talk about Christian unity, skip to Thought No. 10.

To adapt some of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s words: “How are we different; let me count the ways.” Here is a short list: skin color, political affiliation, religious doctrine and tradition, social status, financial level, national citizenship, and school or club membership. You could add many more. And the more the better! Our differences are absolutely essential, especially those that are more obvious and extreme. I’ll not justify any person’s or group’s reasons for their unrighteous differences but, like the poor, our differences will always be with us [Matt. 26:11; Mark 14:7; John 12:8], and they have the Lord’s overarching reasons for existing.

Differences are like gears in a machine. They must exist and they have reasons for being different. When the teeth on the gears mesh properly, they accomplish the Chief Engineer’s plan. When the teeth do not mesh, there is much grinding and the machine goes nowhere. The gears must properly oppose and/or be different from one another in order to function and the opposing position must be properly engaged and aligned. If they are not properly engaged, there is no coordinated action or final product [Eph. 4:13-16] – only apartness and dysfunction.

The church is the Chief Engineer’s special machine, designed for perfection. Wherever we are not engaged and aligned there is dysfunction. Each gear can polish and oil itself and proclaim its readiness for the Chief Engineer’s purpose, but to no effect if not engaged properly. [“No effect” is meant in the same way as what Jesus said about Himself, that of Himself He could do “nothing” – John 5:19, 30. He could have done much, but it would have gone down on the heavenly books as “nothing.”]

The church is greatly disengaged from itself while engaging with the world. We are doing poorly although we have the One who gives us the clear advantage. Our Chief Engineer has plans to move us along together, not apart. That requires differences. That requires unity [engagement and alignment]. It is working wherever and to the degree that we love one another, by the Lord’s definition of love.

10. Some of us are anchored in the past [traditionalists] and some in the future [visionaries, dreamers and idealists]. Whatever we are in those respects can be a gift of God, although poorly showing to be so at times.

The Jewish religious leaders in Jesus’ day, being traditionalists, were not looking for change; they were trying to prevent change, unless it was change that would move them back into something like their sometimes-glorious past. They did not want a more full revelation of Jehovah, Who stood before them. The natural and the past satisfied them, as it does most naturally-minded saints. They hated change. They didn’t see that change was the only way to make progress.

The dreamer’s gift can be equally ineffective. Everything must be new, including style and authorities. The old must pass away, even if its passing leaves a void. Their attitude can leave a shaky foundation upon which to move forward. Example: The French revolution, in which all previous order and leadership was destroyed in order to purify the nation of the old order. The nation fell apart. Another example: The Christian who does not understand or appreciate his roots in Judaism and the Old Testament. Jesus said that which we call the Old Testament speaks of Him [Luke 24:27; John 5:39] and that the things God’s people went through in the Old Testament were for our sakes – 1 Cor. 10:11. For the dreamer, change of almost any sort is considered to be progress.

11. “Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none.” Wm. Shakespeare

12. “Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway.” John Wayne

13. Don’t support, vote for, or in any way travel life’ road with someone whose sound-good purposes employ hate, division or envy for accomplishment of their goals. Their great goals never justify those means; however, righteous means often justify and anoint righteous goals. That’s why some of the Lord’s more outstanding kingdom tools are patience, love and unity. For example, our freedom of choice and His delay in returning for us allow more evil to flourish, but it also shows His patience toward us and confidence in His timing, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance – 2 Pet. 3:9.

Satan, who is a hater, divider and stirrer of envy, uses those pressurizing tools on mankind, intending that their use result to his personal benefit in quicker course. It is true that evil or bad news often stirs us to action more quickly than does righteousness, and that suspicion can have us more prepared for a fight than can trust, but such is the [occasional] cost of righteous souls and peaceful lives.

Common sense can carry us a long way and keep us on the right road, although it does get in the way of understanding some people.

14. How was it possible that religious and cultured Europe could be the cradle of such an evil as the holocaust in World War II? I don’t know all of the answers to my own question, but some are; 1) the population thought it would never happen to or through or among them [1 Cor. 10:12], 2) there was more cultural Christianity and less spiritual reality than was apparent [1 Cor. 2:14-15], 3) it was a gradual process and they got away with it before enough others noticed and acted [Neh. 9:16-25], 4) the people believed what their government told them, probably because they thought they would benefit thereby or at least that they themselves were not responsible [Jam. 1:14], 5) only small minorities were initially targeted [Micah 3:11], 6) those small minorities were originally of “outcast” groups, such as homosexuals and the retarded [Jam. 2:1-9], and 7) the people were targeted with propaganda [deliberate, carefully contrived deception] [Gen.3:1-6].

15. Why did the Lord set up Satan to destroy all that Job had, except for his wife? Specifically, Satan destroyed all of Job’s children and possessions and health, leaving him his wife plus only the spark of life in his body.

Job’s wife loved him more than she loved the Lord. She urged Job, who was in a painful, near-death condition, to accept her position [love God less] so that God would strike him dead – Job 2:9. That’s a common tool of Satan in any relationship – Matt. 10:37. The love of one’s self above one’s love for God disqualifies a believer from discipleship – John 12:25. So, Satan left Job’s wife with Job because she was his soft-hearted, human-love tool whom he would use to tempt Job to not love the Lord with everything he was and had – Deut. 6:5; Matt 22:36-38; Mark 12:28-30.

Back to the main part of the question. The basic answer of why the Lord does anything is “because it pleases Him” – Matt. 11:26. It has been suggested otherwise that the Lord’s replenishment of Job’s family by giving him 10 replacement children [Job 42:13] was to “make it right with Job so he would not grow old alone.” That certainly could be a blessing, but it doesn’t seem to fit Job’s need, considering Job’s level of spirituality. God knows.

16. Something new seems to be going on in Israel. Orthodox Jews are opening to the Jewish Jesus [but not to the Christian Jesus]. For most of us Gentiles, that requires some explanation.

R. and C. H. report that the 2,000 years of Israel’s blindness to the gospel appears to be lifting. If Messianic Jews keep the traditional Jewish holidays, and celebrate Chanukah in December [even while stating that Jesus is the light of Chanukah and is the Light of the world], they are considered to still be Jewish, removing their belief in Jesus Christ as a block to personal fellowship and hearing of the gospel.

Perhaps Romans 11:25 is beginning to be fulfilled in our days.

17. I was reading an article on physical pain. The point was that if pain is focused upon the pain will increase, and if it is not focused upon it will diminish or cease. The example given in the article was of a young boy who had a laceration that needed to be sutured. He had already been in some pain so resisted being sutured due to fear of more pain. His father briefly halted the procedure, telling the doctor that he had a solution. He handed his son a 25 cent piece and told him to focus on it, which he did. The fear dissipated and the wound was successfully closed – Phil. 4:8-9.

18. How about an exercise on the value of suffering? We will keep our focus on Jesus, but peek at our own calling and response to our calling as we look at Him.

 a) For His Heavenly Father, was it sufficient for Jesus to be Jesus His Son, the Messiah? No. That

 was necessary but not sufficient. [Peek at yourself. Does your Father consider it sufficient that

 you are born again and headed to heaven to be with Him forever? No.]

 b) For His Heavenly Father, was it sufficient for Jesus to be an anointed preacher who was able to do

 miracles? No. That was also necessary but not sufficient. [Is it sufficient for your Father that you

 are His child forever and have an anointed ministry that glorifies Him? No.]

 c) For His Heavenly Father, was it sufficient for Jesus to be absolutely perfect and completely

 righteous? No. That was necessary but still not sufficient. [Is it sufficient for your Father that you

 are His child forever, have an anointed ministry that glorifies Him, and that you have had Christ’s

 complete righteousness imputed to you and are improving in showing it? No.]

 d) Then what else was necessary for Jesus Christ to be sufficient for His Father? He had to suffer

 according to the will of His Father. [Must I/you/we suffer according to the will of our Father? Yes.]

 e) Why did He have to suffer?

 1) For purposes during His earth life: a) perfecting Him personally, b) preparing Him for ministry,

 and c) becoming an example for those who would believe in [= follow] Him.

 2) For purposes after His earth life – Heb. 2:9; Luke 24:26; Rev. 5:all. Reigning in glory, not just

 being there.

 f) Likewise, we must also suffer for the same purposes – Mark 8:31-38; 1 Pet. 2:21.

 g) Paul’s personal example – Acts 9:16; Acts 20:17-24.

 h) Our flesh must be voluntarily crucified before God’s and “our” glory can be revealed, but not

 before we can be sons and on our way to heaven [simply put]. We must suffer in order to 1) be

 changed, be prepared and show Christ, and 2) gain later rewards. All of this must happen in this

 earth life.

 i) It is not enough for our Father to have babies. Babies must grow up and produce Family results.

 j) For suffering to produce eternal effects it must result in our putting down our flesh so Christ who

 lives in us can reign in us. That is what our Father sees and for which He crowns us Kings

 [= overcomers]. The overcoming is of those things within us, of our flesh.

 k) Matthew 5:10-11 – Blessed are those who suffer. We are blessed by our Father’s pleasure

 and by receiving His heavenly rewards forever [not just by going to heaven.]

 l) Don’t fret if you are not currently suffering. We will be given more opportunities daily. If you

 failed an opportunity today, more will come tomorrow. Just don’t be selective [rejecting some

 opportunities], and there is no need to be inventive [devising our own opportunities].

19. John Ruskin [1819-1900], British art critic, writer and philanthropist said something much like James [2:14-26] had stated earlier, that “What we think, or what we know, or what we believe is, in the end, of little consequence. The only consequence is what we do.” J. R., a backslidden Evangelical, may have been preaching a gospel of works, but James was preaching a gospel of putting hands and feet to our faith.

20. It could be said that when Jesus told the woman who had been caught in adultery, “Go and sin no more,” that He meant she should not again commit adultery – John 8:11. Not many consider that Jesus told her to “sin no more,” meaning to not again commit any sin, but that is exactly what He said and meant.

The Son of God came to do and to say only that which His Father wanted Him to do and say. He never told anyone to do less [live by a lower standard] than His Father told Him to do [live]. That meant perfection was the only standard and that was what He taught them and still teaches us. There is no other standard. He even applied that standard to His green recruits, telling them to be perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect – Matt. 5:48. Whew!

He meant what He said to the woman. Those instructions still apply.

21. Roadside sign designed to promote safer driving: “This year 10,000 men will die due to stubbornness.” Scribbled in: “No we won’t!”

22. If you have been thinking that Jesus wept at Lazarus’ tomb because of His grief, you are right. But, it was not because of His grief over Lazarus’ death.

Jesus knew for 4 days that Lazarus was dead, and knew that according to His Father’s will and the Holy Spirit’s power He [Jesus] would call Lazarus out of the tomb back into natural life. For that reason alone He would not have wept. But there is more.

When you read the account in John 11 you see that despite Jesus’ repeated thrusts of simple, eternal truth into the unbelief of those who should have believed [meaning they were God’s people], they could not or would not believe. That’s what grieved Him. He attacked their unbelief several times head-on with the truth before dropping the topic and getting on with Lazarus. He wept at their spiritual deafness and unbelief.

That calls for a Selah.

I’m surprised that He did not dismiss the unbelievers before raising Lazarus. He had done that before, as when He raised the synagogue official’s daughter from the dead -- Matt. 9:23-25. Unbelief seems so benign but is a powerful deterrent to the Holy Spirit’s workings. Even Jesus could not do some things when unbelief was of a certain magnitude – Matt. 13:58; Mark 6:5-6. He even fussed at them on a very special occasion when their unbelief was tremendously out of place – Mark 16:14.

23. The ministry position I would least like to be called to is that of pastor, the kind of pastor who is biblically called and anointed and serving. It is a “heavy” job. By my evaluation, it would be far too much for me. I would have to absolutely die and come alive totally in the Lord – no compromise. [The results are wonderful but the process is agonizing.] It requires loads of patience, almost continual death to self, and often in itself provides little obvious [read “rewarding” or “encouraging”] results. I admire righteous [guileless and mature] pastors, and am thankful when those kinds are enabled to be pure pastors [meaning they pastor the flock but do not do distracting additional ministries, such as church administration, planning, yard work].

Mixed in with all of that is the insidious development of phariseeism that seems to continually press against and into the pastoral ministry. By pharaseeism I mean [and I will start with the smallest feature] a fleshly compulsion to think I know when I don’t know, an ability to dodge the darts of truth in order to defend my error, to accept the supposed position of Chief Shepherd of my flock, to take some delight in being distinguished from other Christian groups, to be willing to elevate tradition to as high a level as appears useful, to believe that my own theology is correct and others’ are wrong, to be glad of my religious position and distinction compared to others’, to need to withhold myself from open fellowship with those pastors who are sufficiently variant with me, to have the ability to see wrong and sin in others but not in myself when I am doing the same or worse thing, to preach about and pray for things that I am not about to accept or act upon for myself, and to not know when the above speaks of me.

I know that those failings are not exclusive to the pastoral ministry, but pastors are in the supposed position of not being able to turn the corporate ship [repent]. They have made commitments to a body of believers that become more binding on them than their commitment to the Lord. They could lose their job and perhaps not be able to find another. They must provide for their families. So, it comes as no big surprise that when a need for basic change is acknowledged the response is, “My congregation is not ready for that.” Years later the congregation, the pastor, and his response are unchanged.

It seems that the pastoral ministry can lead to real bondage.

24. Some thinking is credited with being profound, when actually it is common to almost everyone. When it is said or written by a notable person, the credit usually goes to that person for “discovering” the matter. My current example is “All wish to possess knowledge, but few, comparatively speaking, are willing to pay the price.” – Juvenal [late first to early second century A.D.], Roman poet. Now that we know he said it “first,” every time we talk about “many people want something but few are willing to pay the price” I suppose it only fair that we credit Juvenal. ☺

Talking and writing could become tedious if we tried to seek the “first” source of everything, there being no new thought under the sun.

25. When I see something in Scripture or in Spirit that the Lord wants me to do, I usually take it as a command, not a suggestion or request. I don’t know exactly what, in my life with the Lord, the root of that is but Daddy loved me so much that He sent His Son [my oldest Brother] Jesus to die for me and sent His Holy Spirit to live in and empower me to live as Jesus. That gives me the desire and power to do whatever He wants, so I suppose it is therefore easy for me to accept His desire or will as a command, no matter how He expresses it. Everything He says and wants is therefore my command. Love is like that.

A good example of that reality in Scripture is found in Matthew 14:28. The disciples were in a boat during a storm. Jesus came to them walking on the water. When Peter recognized Jesus he asked the Lord to “command me to come to You on the water.” Peter knew that if Jesus verbalized His will all of creation would hear every word. Those words would be a command to creation, including the storm and the water, not only to Peter. He knew that if Jesus commanded Peter to walk on the water he could walk on the water! Peter did not ask if Jesus wanted him to walk on the water. Peter needed something firm to stand on – the command of Jesus. He got it.

NOTE: Peter acted only in faith, not on the reasoning as I explained it above, but his faith encompassed and superseded my reasoning.

The words of Jesus are firm. They are commands that, when we who have free will obey them as commands, creation also obeys.

26. If you take away religion you can’t hire enough police. People have to believe in a god to whom they are and will be accountable, or they will do whatever seems good to them in their own eyes. Under God, believers voluntarily choose to obey the law. A democracy of any sort [such as our Republic] works only when people voluntarily obey the law. The more we cease that voluntary compliance, the more laws are needed, until we become a nation governed by laws which become more pervasive, intrusive and totalitarian. Some are proud that we are a nation governed by laws. They seem blind to the fact that more and more laws are becoming necessary for the governed. Best is the nation that is governed by morality that springs voluntarily from biblical authority.

27. Psalm 15 has only 5 verses. I enjoy reading it because it gives me a clear target to aim my life toward. David wrote it, the Holy Spirit inspired it, our Father wants us to grasp it, and now we Jesus people can enjoy being the people who ask those questions.

Verse 1 – “O Lord, who will you allow to live closely with you while both You and he/she are in dire need, having nothing but one another? And who is that person that you then allow to live closely with you in an elegant life, having everything with you? [Actually, the Lord’s answer is built into those two questions. That person is one who is content to join Him in need as in plenty.]

Verse 2 – “The one who orients his life to goodness only, who guards My life in others, whose actions spring from my life within him.

Verse 3 – “The one who knows others’ secrets, who has opportunity to expose them for personal benefit, but does not. [See John 12:6.]

Verse 4 – “He who recognizes the unprincipled and does not associate with them, but who stands with those who love and honor the Lord no matter their social status or the strength of the opposition. That person I can trust. In turn I will stand with him.

Verse 5 – “That person is anchored in me. His vision is clear. He knows what he wants and will not be enticed. He will not be loosed from his moorings. He is invited into My abode wherever I am.”

28. Jesus recognized the absurdity of human thinking, often pointing it out to us. A simple example of His insightfulness [actually of simple observation and understanding] is found in Matthew 11, where He said John the Baptist was criticized for not eating commonly acceptable foods and for not drinking alcoholic beverages, but then the same folks criticized Him [Jesus] for eating those foods and for drinking alcoholic beverages. His closing comments on the matter showed that He felt no need to deal with that problem at that time, that the process of His life’s journey would show God’s wisdom to be much higher than man’s – Matt. 11:19(b); I Cor. 1:18-31.

That type of absurdity is alive and sick today. On the one hand, when you advise a counselee against a particular folly, resistant flesh replies, “But you did it, too.” On the other hand, if you have never done that particular folly, resistant flesh replies, “But you don’t know because you never tried it,” or “You don’t understand because you have never been in my situation.” At that point, like Jesus’ response, we can say, “Our lives will show which is the wisest choice.” That may be the end of the conversation, as you leave the beloved counselee in the freedom of informed self-responsibility.

29. “Who are you to judge the servant of another?” – Rom. 14:4(a). Worse [in my opinion] is to judge another man’s bride, especially if it is Jesus’ bride, because God has placed the wife [of man and Christ] under the husband’s authority and responsibility. That means “Stay out of that matter. Don’t walk through that doorway.” Sometimes that is difficult, but only on the flesh, because we are called to righteously judge all things [1 Cor. 2:14], but not to judge with an adverse attitude [Matt. 7:1-2]. “Judging all things” does not necessarily mean we are then to open our mouths about that which/those whom we have judged. That makes is easy, but only if in the spirit, because we are offered the mind [facts, attitude, wisdom] of Christ – 1 Cor. 2:16. The flesh often feels compelled to judge adversely and to speak what it has judged.

On the topic of our judging Christ’s bride, the church, He knew beforehand and knows now all about His bride. He picked her and has not rejected her and does not need me to take over and try to insert myself into His place and function. But, He has called me to be eyes and a voice for Him to the church. As such, I must have righteous motives and speak kindly when dealing with real or supposed negatives.

So, having said that; the church is in trouble. To variable degrees, it is blind and deaf and has hardened its stance against unity, while praying for and talking about unity. It does not understand that unity among spiritually healthy people requires neither a common theology nor name-identical signs on the churchhouse walls. Those things are essential for naturally-minded, non-spiritual people. As examples, the more successful missionaries are servant-brothers with those of other religions to whom they are sent to present the gospel. They may give their lives because of the spirit of unity within them, while possibly not seeing conversion-fruit of their ministries.

It is delightful to hear from missionaries of various Christian denominations of their co-ministries and co-worshipping with one another while on the foreign field. Somehow, clergy back home do not teach, preach or live that way, and the missionaries are guarded about that aspect of their foreign ministries when they report things to the folks back home.

At times the church has displayed unity, as when it has ecumenical meetings, usually scheduled once yearly. Those are baby steps in the right direction. If those steps are encouraging to the church, that very encouragement is a revelation of the low level of unity we have, compared to that which Christ Jesus asked His Father to give us. That prayer’s results are yet to be realized. It will be answered. It should be of high interest to each of us that we are part of the body of believers whom He prayed would be united with one another like He and His Father are united with one another – John 17:20-23. That takes more than prayer because prayer is not the strategy for unity; it is the way to apprehend the strategy. As James said, the fulfillment of prayer requires work [2:17], and work requires a strategy.

TESTIMONY: While talking to a spiritually hungry and “desperate” group of Catholic and Protestant ministers in Belfast about the religious division in their nation, I mentioned that in my home church in Houston, Texas we had clergy and leaders of multiple denominations preaching, teaching, counseling, and functioning as leaders of that faithful congregation. Those denominations were Episcopalian, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Assembly of God, Church of Christ, Presbyterian, Independent, and possibly others that I do not now recall. Those Belfast clergymen asked how we handled the differences in our theologies. The answer: “We don’t do anything.” With that simple and fully honest answer came to them the revelation that solid, fully functional, Holy Spiritual fellowship is based on something higher than our individual theologies. No additional information was needed. They chose to not have the fragile, shallow unity which is limited when based on trying to overlook divergent theologies, but instead to have the spiritual unity as prayed for by Jesus. They chose to be a family of sons of their Father through Jesus Christ.

I pray that the same can be said now of you.