THOUGHTS OF SEPTEMBER, 2014

1. Occasionally someone close to me asks why I did not acknowledge or respond to something said in a group discussion. In this case it seemed to my friend that I had not heard or noticed something that was really important. Even after I explained that indeed I had heard, and that everything said does not need to be corrected or responded to, but often overlooked, a puzzled expression remained.

All errors need not be corrected on the spot; some not at all. That was not my understanding or practice years ago, but perhaps should have been. There is an art to making or not making responses, and wisdom plays a role in that art, such as “later.”

Part of wisdom is knowing when to not speak, when to not get involved, when to not respond, but when to simply “shut up.”

2. Try this Bread Pudding recipe: Beat together 4 eggs, 2 cups milk, 1/3 cup sugar, ½ tsp. vanilla, ¼ tsp. salt. Pour over 2 ½ cups dry bread cubes [or 3 ½ slices of bread]. Bake 325\* for 40-45 min [or until knife comes out clean].

Part of good nutrition is knowing when to cook bread pudding, when to cook it for others, when to take only a taste, and when to not even go near the table.

3. Keep your peace, whether you are going to sit or shove, or have been shoved. Being peaceful allows for good judgment, timing, and success. When you keep your peace you gain quality friends whom you may not have otherwise gained, and you will probably lose the ones you should [that’s good, too]. Keeping your peace does not mean being passive.

4. We have so many options in life, including in our life with the Lord. For example, if we will humble ourselves the Lord will not have to do it for us. But, if we won’t, He will – Jam. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5-6. When He humbles us the procedure feels less good, although humbling ourselves is also hard on the flesh, I hear. The greater pain when the Lord humbles us is partly because we are still resisting that which started out as a gentle nudge. “I won’t” was not a good choice on our part, considering we were saying it to God – He being the Irresistible Force and Immovable Object.

“I won’t” shows a strong self-will but of the unwise type. The teacher told the little boy to sit down, but he didn’t. After a few more “sit downs” and finally a defiant “I won’t” the teacher spanked the boy and plunked him firmly into his chair. True to his nature, the boy said, “I’m still standing up inside.”

Whether our “I won’ts” are “I won’t be on time,” or “I won’t forgive,” or “I won’t cooperate,” it’s as bad as the “I will” of “I will do what I want to do.” Satan chose that “I will” stance when he tried to exalt himself over God – Is. 14:13-14. The result of Satan’s rebelliousness is that he is under the humbling hand of God, although he is not yet humbled. He is resisting the Irresistible Force and Immovable Object, and it is painful. The day is coming when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that “Jesus Christ is Lord over me.” Satan won’t be still standing inside.

No matter the originating cause(s) of our “I won’ts,” as adults we are now self-responsible before God and man. It’s up to them [God and man] whether to cut us some slack because of others’ failures during the formation of our character. It appears that in most cases our pleas for leniency due to others’ failures serve only to get us further into trouble because it shows a lack of repentance. Excuses such as “I had bad parents” or “I was only taking orders” sound like “The devil made me do it.”

Few of us will become perfect in this life – Jesus certainly was, and Enoch and Elijah did very well despite their imperfect parents and societies. I have heard it said that it’s not the hand that we are dealt, but the way we play them that makes us winners. Self-responsibility and self-control trump victim-helplessness. They are not the whole story, but they are big parts of it. Some of the best and most timely things a counselor can say are “Grow up!” or “So what!” My healthy-minded, gentle and wise wife is good with those little words, using them in counseling sessions, to herself and to me.

5. Renewal/revival/awakening of a person, congregation or nation is first the seeing of our self as God sees us, then seeing His holiness, then turning from our wicked ways, and then being transformed into His likeness. The latter is what the Lord wants for us. He has paid a terrible price to get it to us. Isn’t it a shame that He has to take us through all of that in order to do the best for us. What a revelation of the nature of sin, that we would resist Him in the process!

6. In the first 8 months of this year more Jews left France and immigrated to Israel than in any whole year [from France]. That is going on all over the world, as Jews increase their return to the Promised Land. Look at this list of returnees per nation for these first 8 months of 2014: France 4,566; Ukraine 3,252; Russia 2,632; and America 2,213. There are several reasons for their return but the biggest is anti-Semitism. Hatred toward the Jews is again building up after having been low in the post-WWII years when there was a worldwide sympathy for the Jews.

If we want to look at the spiritual action behind the natural scene we can go directly to, “What is God doing?” He is bringing the Jews back from their 2,000 years [only 2 days on God’s calendar] of dispersion, gathering them together, setting them up in their land, organizing their enemies against them, preparing for His big battle on their behalf, and for the great revelation of Himself to them. They will look upon Him whom they have pierced, will repent, and will accept His reign over them from upon David’s throne in Jerusalem – Ps. 22:all; Zech. 12:10-14; Rev. 1:7.

7. The cross walk is for those who are ready to bear others’ sins and the consequences of others’ sins, so that those others might be restored in the bond of love with God, themselves, and others. It is not enough for us to be nice Christians. We are called to follow Him bearing our own crosses for the same purposes that He had.

8. Jesus went about doing battle with Satan. Being nice was not always His most effective weapon. So successful was He that the religious leaders were threatened with loss of power, reputation, position, money and people. “Everyone” went after the traveling prophet-teacher, Jesus. He was the strong man in verse 20 of Luke 11 who cast out demons by the finger of God. Satan was the other strong man of verse 21. Jesus is then the stronger man who won the match in verse 22 and took away all of Satan’s armor [defenses] and plunder [people]. Thereafter, we freed ones have been given the opportunity to chose sides, so to speak, and are cautioned, that once we have chosen, to not return to our vomit and mire – Proverb 26:11; 2 Peter 2:22.

9. Some Thoughts on the importance of laws of all sorts in our lives:

Religious, civil, legal and social laws, rules, regulations, ordinances and customs are great – right?

A quick statement to position ourselves: The Law of God through Moses was of two types:

 1) Ceremonial – Jesus fulfilled these, which were animal and plant offerings/sacrifices. We are free from having to keep them as a requirement for becoming acceptable to God. Yet, Paul was free to circumcise Gentile believers for the sake of Jewish Christians [Acts 16:3] or not circumcise – Gal. 2:1-5.

 2) Moral – They are still in effect, such as the Ten Commandments. We [Christians] are acceptable to God through our faith in Jesus Christ, after which we are called and empowered through faith to do good and to be good in loving obedience to Him. Jesus placed them all in His command for us to love.

Having established the above, we will be talking about how laws, rules, regulations, ordinances and customs are here for our benefit. Thus, what is their purpose and how do they work?

 1) Social orderliness – Driving, banking, timeliness, speed limits, airports, workplace, family, military, courts, jail. Remember Romans 13:1-7.

 2) Determination of one’s rationality – Reliable vs. loose cannons can be noted and differently related to – job promotion, selection of friends, leadership, marriage, removal by incarceration.

 3) Identification of specific soul-needs – Some are like Psalm 1:1-6 and Psalm 19:7-11. Love for and ease of rule-keeping indicates there is less anti-godliness in action or undercover. Others are like Romans 7:7, 21-25 in whom laws [God’s or man’s] reveal our deepest imperfections and are meant to drive us to the Lord for forgiveness and change.

NOTE: There are times for us to act outside the law, if we know ourselves – that we are equally free to obey as to not obey, that we are acting wisely and considerately, and that we are willing to suffer peacefully the consequences of our actions. The flesh interprets its rebellion and licentiousness as freedom from legalism, but it is grace that frees us from legalism while perhaps keeping us involved.

 4) It should be noted that Gentiles were never meant to come under the Law of Moses, and that every person has the basic laws of God written on his heart – Romans 2:14-16.

 5) It should be noted also that the gospel is equally as binding on us now, as was the Law of Moses on the Jews, and that our gospel laws will be universal during Christ’s reign. – Isaiah 2:1-4.

 6) Grace and truth [spiritual knowledge] are given to us through Jesus Christ – Grace to be able to live under laws for others’ sakes, and truth to know the good things that are going on in the process of Christian law-keeping – 2 Peter 3:18. Paul circumcised Timothy as a loving act toward misled Messianic Jews [Acts 16:3]. In Christ he was free either way – Gal. 5:6; 6:15. Being truly free is necessary if we are to hear God.

What is going on when I keep laws, rules, regulations, ordinances and customs?

 1) When we are first born again we are spiritual babes – John 1:12. In that verse, “sons” or “children” mean “new-born babies.” Many of us before being born again were adult babies, active loose cannons, and could have continued that way when we became spiritual, but for “the church.” I use “the church” here to mean the manifold graces of God that Jesus has made available to us through other believers. Paul warned Timothy to beware of spiritual immaturity when selecting leaders in the church – 1 Timothy 3:6.

 2) If we did not resist too much, the Holy Spirit in the church placed us under tutors until we matured at least a bit – Gal. 4:2 (1-7). For some, their tutor showed up later or was only submitted to in our later years. God gives us grace for righteousness, to obey laws, and to submit to authority – voluntarily. The flesh can become highly rebellious once we become spiritual and begin to manifest successfully a few [of my!] gifts of God to the church. By necessity Christ’s gifts must abide in individuals but are there to and for the church.

 3) After we attain to some spiritual maturity [Romans 8:14] and begin to bear some fruit that remains [John 15:16, Galatians 5:22-24] we may become “elders,” depending upon our location in the greater body of Christ. Elders are the most spiritually “eld” in any congregation or grouping of believers, thus “eld-er.” That process started when we humbled ourselves and accepted God’s grace to live under laws, rules, regulations, ordinances and customs.

Some signs of maturity, from Galatians 5:22-24. Maturity:

 Loves by actions while being mistreated.

 Is joyful [not happy] even when in pain.

 Remains peaceful under stress.

 Is patient while waiting on God to move.

 Confronts and converts tormentors through honesty and kindness.

 Imparts goodness that is contagious.

 Is faithful to honor others in the face of busy-ness, personal need, and distractions.

 Remains content when overlooked or under-paid/under-rewarded [that’s actually impossible].

 Remains self-governed when in need.

Notice in Galatians 5:23 that those who are adequately fruitful are coming out-from-under all laws. Their Master’s target for them is complete freedom. Verse 24 points out that their classroom had been their crosses, meaning that they had been learning to accept sinners and the consequences of others’ sins in order to restore those others to the bond of love with God, themselves, and others.

10. When you meditate on Jesus on the cross, which thought is prevalent – “How terrible man’s sin is!” or “How great God’s love is!”? The first thought has to do with knowing that our flesh has been judged; the second with our being forgiven. Without an adequate dose of the first, we are inadequately impressed [but pleased] with being forgiven. Without an adequate dose of the second, the first becomes burdensome. A proper balance of the two [which must be variable in time, place and person] maintains our right relationship with the Lord.

11. It is very uncommon for me to be late when I have committed to a certain time to arrive, to complete a project, etc. I find it easy to keep my word, being in control of time, time not being in control of me. Others think that timeliness is an indication of legalism, that arriving late shows grace, peace and freedom. But we know that timeliness [not cleanliness] is next to godliness, don’t we! :=) Golda Meir [1898-1978], Israel’s fourth Prime Minister, agreed. She said, “I must govern the clock – not be governed by it.”

12. Do you feel sometimes that the Lord doesn’t require much of you, but that you are ready if He ever does? Read more in the gospels. Gather a few friends for a weekly session of “Why Not?!” Challenge one another to face every question Jesus asked and every command He gave. In those 4 books are enough requirements to stir the truth of 2 Corinthians 5:21, no matter which translation or paraphrase you read them in. We are the righteousness of God in Christ.

Do you feel sometimes that the Lord requires too much of you, and that you never are quite ready for those sudden events that He drops into your life? If so, you are probably not walking in the Spirit at the level that He has actually raised you up to. The “incidents” of your life overcome you because you are not living between incidents as you should, meaning you may be “coasting” instead of peddling. Coasting can be too much junk TV, too much of anything that otherwise is fine in moderation, hanging out with people who drain you because of their non-Christian behavior, not enough righteous friends, etc. If so, you should get serious and reevaluate your life-style.

Oswald Chambers dealt with the problem a bit differently when he wrote: “Do you find yourself saying, ‘If God calls me to battle, of course I will rise to the occasion?’ Yet you won’t rise to the occasion unless you have done so on God’s training ground. If you are not doing the task that is closest to you now, which God has engineered into your life, when the crisis comes, instead of being fit for battle you will be revealed as being unfit. Crises always reveal a person’s true character.”

13. The Lord is perfect [and perfects us]; He is just [and justifies us]; He is merciful [so He doesn’t smush us]. My Thought here is that He commands perfection [Matt. 5:48], gives us everything needed to be perfect [2 Cor. 5:21], knows we will not use that which we have [1 John 1:10], and restores us when we come to our senses [1 John 1:9]. He is a good example for parents of physical and spiritual children.

14. John Wooden [1910-2010], committed Christian, highly successful American basketball coach, said, “Talent is God-given; be humble. Fame is man-given; be thankful. Conceit is self-given; be careful.” That’s hard to improve upon but I will at least adjust it to my experience: “Talent is God-given, let Him use it. Fame is man-given; be vigilant. Conceit is self-given; trim your imagination, quickly.”

15. Arthur Ashe [1943-1993], world No. 1 tennis professional, was a humanitarian. He did lots of good things from that motivation. He is reported to have said, “From what we get, we can make a living; what we give, however, makes a life.” Have you noticed that many things from Jesus’ and others’ teachings have laid the basis for thinking and acting even in unbelievers? The truth is the truth, whether it is in religious or secular words and minds.

16. Jesus was credited by His Father as having done gloriously well, so I am confident that we can apply His own words to His success, modifying it for specificity: “Well done, good and faithful Son; enter into the joy of your Father.” According to Hugh Leonard [1926-2009], Irish dramatist, “A thing well done is worth doing.” Again, we are encouraged by a not notably religious person to do the things Jesus did well. Eternal quality principals have established this world [and all of creation], whether we createds acknowledge the Creator or not. They cannot be escaped, and will be found by all who search for the Truth using reason. Romans 1:18-20 helps us with that.

17. This will be on Shepherds, Sheep and Goats – no matter our denomination or theology.

There is only one church, we being the worldwide community of believers in Christ Jesus. Denominations are religious divisions within our community. For many Christians, denominations are but minimal divisions but to others they are major problems and cause at least separation of fellowship and worship. Denominational divisiveness is variable from place to place and person to person. They certainly do not serve to strengthen our community of believers.

Jesus Christ came to form a body; not only a body but a body with all of its parts. Yet, not only a body with all of its parts, but a body with all of its parts functioning under the direction of its Head. When it becomes whole, and all of its parts are functioning under the direction of its one Head, it will be coordinated and empowered. We will be those who fulfill His promise -- the gates of hell will not stand against us.

The church’s ambient cultures have also noticed our divisions, and have long ago concluded that the church’s contrary behaviors and beliefs are unlikely to be inspired by a one-minded God. Those non-Christians notice our differences and our attitudes toward one another, thinking less of our God because of us.

The healing for our culture and for Jesus’ church is that we love one another. When we do, our Head will display our differences before the world and say, “And see how they love one another!” The world will “see” because it cannot duplicate Christ’s love, especially in the face of its own differences.

This little teaching on shepherds, sheep and goats is an attempt to speak to Christians about achieving a greater basic unity. “Reformation” must start somewhere and, as usual, the best place to start is with “me” and those close to me, called “us.”

We live in communities of many types and sizes – those at church, at work, in school, and all sorts of social groupings. What I write here is meant to say that as church congregations we need not change the names on our church buildings, or our theologies; but do need to change our hearts.

Each of us bears responsibility for unity, but shepherds [pastors, clergy, ministers, priests] bear the larger responsibility and pay the largest price now and when each stands before the Great Shepherd. May the Lord give abundant grace to our shepherds who, in my opinion and observation, have the most difficult and costly personal calling in the church. May their rewards be doubly commensurate.

NOTE: Perfection is the standard in God’s kingdom. Jesus told His disciples to be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect. In Medical School if I had asked to be taught some lower standard of care than the best, I would have been booted out. Perfection is our target, sin is too often our tendency, truth and grace are His methods, and wonderful are His results in those who accept His ways.

Our working definitions of 3 certain kinds of church people:

 1. Shepherds are those who are called by God to feed, protect and make families of their particular flocks of faith at whatever personal cost to their selves. The shepherd’s ministry is focused on giving of himself, not on taking for himself. He is worthy of his hire but is not for sale. Through his soul and body flows his flock’s food. Jesus is the shepherd’s perfect example:

 a) Jesus said, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, ..” – John 6:35. Local shepherds who feed their sheep with Christ’s heavenly food in and through themselves can expect the same results as Jesus produced. Different food produces different results.

 b) He then said, “I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” – John 6:51. The bread supplied the flock by local shepherds is Christ’s life in and flowing through the shepherd.

 c) In Jeremiah 23:1-4 we are given three steps concerning shepherds’ responsibilities, behavior and consequences:

 1) Bad shepherds destroy instead of feed and protect their flocks, and scatter instead of unite them.

 2) Therefore the Lord Himself [Jesus] takes action. He re-gathers the flock and feeds and protects them.

 3) Then He raises up good shepherds who will go through Him for access to His sheep. More later on “going through Him.”

 d) More on the shepherd’s responsibility before God. See Ezekiel 34:1-16. This is one of the most powerful chapters in all Scripture, and probably the most powerful to shepherds. It addresses:

 1) The feeding of the sheep, as opposed to shepherds taking from the sheep.

 2) The healing of the weak and sickly sheep.

 3) The scattering of sheep.

 4) The shepherds not searching for and rescuing scattered sheep.

 5) The use of force on the flock instead of loving care.

 Responsibility is laid on the shepherds when the sheep wander from place to place [church to church], becoming susceptible to charlatans when they may eventually find some sort and degree of life. Beginning in verse 10 of Ezekiel 34 the Good Shepherd shows us at least one of His ways of handling that problem; He will diminish attendance in the churches of the calloused, self-centered shepherds, round up the wandering sheep, and put them in a good, peaceful place.

We will see later that if a shepherd is actually a goatherd, his sheep may be replaced with goats. Shepherds feed sheepfood; goatherds feed goatfood.

 Contrast verses 2-5 with Jesus’ description of His own ministry as Shepherd in Matthew 11:4-5.

 e) Psalm 23 is a beautiful setting for our study of true shepherds v. hirelings. Those very words are spoken about shepherds by their sheep as they praise and pray for them before the Great Shepherd’s throne.

 f) Good shepherds also care for their flocks in the dark times. The Lord schedules meetings with them in a timely manner – Luke 2:8-20.

 g) We are given excellent examples of shepherds of God’s people:

 1) David protected sheep, then protected people-sheep, then offered himself for the people-sheep when it appeared that nothing else would do -- 2 Samuel 24:17 (10-25).

 2) In faith, Abraham obeyed God, offering of himself by giving his best lamb, his son, Isaac -- Genesis 22.

 3) Moses offered himself when Jehovah was about to move against Israel -- Exodus 32:32.

 4) Jesus offered Himself fully and perfectly for His sheep. See Matthew 26 & 27.

 Shepherds are life-giving food for their sheep. What Shepherds are to their flocks is more important than what Shepherds do for them.

 h) Shepherds-in-training learn to extend themselves. When they give the sheep all that they have [and call the sheep to do the same], the Great Shepherd makes them fully adequate for their current need – Mark 6:33-44.

 i) Shepherds are not alone in caring for their sheep – Ephesians 4:1-11. The callings on the Great Shepherd’s flocks are too broad and deep for only the shepherd’s ministry. Ephesians 4:12-16.

JESUS WAS AND IS THE ONLY PERFECT SHEPHERD – HE GAVE HIS LIFE AS FOOD FOR THE SHEEP.

 2. Sheep are members of a flock who acknowledge their need of a shepherd’s ministry, recognize their particular shepherd’s voice and that his is especially life-giving to them, and who have found or are seeking their abiding place in that shepherd’s flock. Sheep are helpless without a shepherd. Sheep get sick if not led to good pastures and clear water. If shepherds feed goat food to their flocks, sheep will either leave or get sick and begin to act like goats. Our Great Shepherd loves us and designs the best for us in flocks:

 a) So we “will not be like sheep which have no shepherd” – Numbers 27:15-17; Matthew 9:37-38.

 b) “God makes the solitary/lonely to dwell in a house/family” – Psalm 68:6.

 c) The church is instructed to take care of orphans and widows [and others] who are in need. See 1 Timothy 5:1-16 and James 1:27.

 d) In John 10:1-18 we are given a detailed description of how good shepherds gain access to sheep, how those sheep recognize their shepherds and the shepherds recognize their sheep, how the shepherds are to “go before” their sheep, and how sheep are to recognize “shepherds” who are thieves, robbers and strangers.

JESUS WAS AND IS THE ONLY PERFECT SHEEP – HE DID ONLY WHAT HIS PERFECT FATHER TOLD HIM TO DO.

 3. Goats are “members of the congregation” who have not yet found God’s grace to acknowledge their need for that [or perhaps for any] shepherd’s food, flock or protection. They do not recognize their shepherd’s soul as being especially life-giving to them, nor that he bears God’s spiritual authority over and responsibility for them. The flock is not “home” to them in the sense of it being their family, although it may be their denominational landing pad. Goats do better with goatherds than with shepherds, but they really do not need a goatherd because they can usually fend for themselves. They will be satisfied with and thrive on any kind of food. They do well in the high, rocky places where they can escape from and fight off their predators. A few goats can break a shepherd’s heart; a few more can make a shepherd feel like an absolute failure, but goatherds are accustomed to and acceptable of goat behavior.

 a) Returning to Ezekiel 34 but to verses 17-31, we now see the Lord dealing with the goats within the flock instead of with the hireling shepherds. There was disarray very much like that in Corinth. See 1 Corinthians 11:27-34. God’s solution is first to draw the wandering flock to Himself, then to separate the sheep from the goats. He deals lovingly with those who are sheep, then gives them David [Jesus and His shepherds] for their shepherd. It was the Good Shepherd’s time to separate the sheep from the goats, and to deal with each accordingly.

 b) Another difference between goats and sheep is given us in Matthew 25:31-46. Nations of individuals who are alive in their earthly bodies when Jesus sits on His throne in Jerusalem during the millennium will be judged in regards to their righteous and unrighteous behavior during the tribulation, especially as toward Israel. The sheep will say, “Wow! When did we do those good things?” The goats will say, “Surely not! When did we do those bad things?” The habitually righteous life is not impressed with its goodness; the habitually unrighteous life is not impressed with its badness.

 c) The Lord Jesus told us about the goats [tares] among sheep [wheat] and how we are to handle that enduring situation – Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43. He will remove any who need removing and will do so with perfect timing.

A testimony about a goat in the flock, and what was done about him. The story has been altered to conceal his identity.

This man was well known for his rumor mongering and gossiping. He thought he knew more than anyone, including me!! That, plus his interruptive behavior in Bible Class, irritated me considerably. He arrived early enough at meetings to take a seat on the front row. When I first came on the scene he seized the opportunity to contest with me, the out-of-town guest teacher. He felt free and was indeed free to offer corrections, not simply to ask questions. He hadn’t learned the axiom that the class member who talks more than any other class member is talking too much.

After a couple of meetings I recognized his gift of “tester,” meaning after a couple of weeks of grinding my teeth at his challenges and interruptions. As soon as I understood what the Lord was doing I wrote him a letter in which I thanked him for being instrumental in the class, for being a blessing to me personally, for helping to clarify various points, and other things **that were entirely true**.I did not lie or exaggerate, but I did omit his negatives.

Actually, I had begun to be thankful to God for that goat/tester. I knew that I was in the Master Teacher’s classroom and was determined to pass His course the first time around. Sheep will target goats with patience, love, attention and fellowship. Sheep are drawn to the needy; goats are repelled from the needy. This tester needed love, so I had decided to give him some.

What happened? He showed my letter all over the church and around town. He had really needed affirming and was basking in it. As a side blessing, he stopped challenging and interrupting. Any good teacher stops testing students when they have passed the course, and the Lord is a Good Teacher.

Note: The ministry of “tester” is one of the most necessary and potentially effective in the church. The tester ministry convicts and purifies serious Christians, but the tester “minister” does not receive any earthly or heavenly reward for his/her ministry. In fact, the tester receives punishment if he/she does not repent and change.

NOTE: THERE ARE NO TOTALLY IMPERFECT GOATS, maybe.

18. Several can look at the same scene, yet see it differently. Some art is certainly that way. Many Israelis heard Jesus teach, but they heard differently – some oppositely. Because some would hear His words, understand them in the natural, and reject them, He spoke at that time to them in parables. That was very graceful because they had not yet been given the full picture of His gospel. For their sakes, He concealed that which He said. Doing so meant they would not be held responsible by His Father for rejecting Him and His message at that stage of His ministry. They simply did not understand – Luke 8:10.

Henry David Thoreau [1817-1862], not known to be a Christian, said “It’s not what you look at that matters, it’s what you see.” That is another example of simple truth having been planted in creation by the Creator.

19. “It is never a compliment to tell someone they have done well, when all they have done is what they should have done” – an adaptation from Luke 17:7-10. That from our brother B. W.

20. In a discussion, when someone is talking, give him time at commas, sentences and paragraphs to think [actually, to listen] without being interrupted so that the Holy Spirit can inform/enlighten/reveal beyond that which has already been sorted and stored in his memory bank. Things from memory can flow accurately, easily and quickly but things currently being formulated come slower and need to be filtered through established truth. Listen humbly in order to allow for assimilated revelation, or you may get something less organized.

21. If you want to be continually led by the Holy Spirit, your flesh will not often find one of its highest priorities – namely, a long-time comfort zone. We like to find a comfortable place and sit in it. The Holy Spirit prefers to move us along. There are rest times, but only occasionally and not for long. The Lord’s replacement for those precious, prolonged comfort zones is the Sabbath rest 24/7 – Heb. 4:9-11. Both comfort zones and Sabbath rests are for our body’s and soul’s repose [the spirit not needing rest], but the first tends to be self-selected and clung to, while the second is an earned reward granted as we learn to labor in full-time faith.

22. Accurate self-esteem [how we look at ourselves] does not come from within. No one knows who he is until informed from without. After that, frequent re-affirmations are required. That again through B. W. who has good insight and listening ears for one who has never been a [natural] father. It does reflect his spiritual fatherhood of many of God’s children.

It should be added that one’s attempts to build one’s own self-esteem are fraught with error, due to personal bias, lack of insight, and ignorance. Of course, others who demean us or exalt us wrongly can also add to the inexactness. The Lord and His obedient ones mold souls accurately. Good parents are continually molding their children’s character, which includes their self-esteem. That essential molding continues throughout this life and for a while in the next, until the Lord finally rids His redeemed of distractions to that which He had been doing in us from our beginnings.

23. George Washington Carver [1864-1943], Christian, American ex-slave, scientist, inventor, botanist and educator said, “How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because some day in your life you will have been all of these.” He also said, “When you do the common things in life in an uncommon way, you will command the attention of the world.” According to published reports, he was no hypocrite.

24. A few words on Spiritual Elders:

“Elder” means older or more advanced compared to others of the same group, of any sort of group.

Spiritual elders are more advanced spiritually [sp. committed, sp. mature, sp. stable, sp. wise, sp. experienced, sp. attuned] than others who are in their spiritual group, that meaning in this Thought a congregation/parish/flock of believers – a local group of those who live by faith in Christ Jesus.

Elders guard the flock spiritually against deception and false teachers. They are God’s “filters,” preventing and/or fighting against spiritual assaults on the flock. They settle matters among the sheep because they have spiritual responsibility for and over them – goats do not understand that relationship. For more on goats see Thought No. 17 above and Ezekiel 34:17-19.

Elders bear the flock’s burdens before God. Like parents in a typical family, the Lord especially listens to the flock’s elders.

Elders may or may not be part of the five-fold ministry of God’s word [Ephesians 4:11] and, in order to be adequately equipped for their work, should be rich in spiritual gifts. See 2 Corinthians 12, 13, 14 and Romans 12:3-21 for some of the Lord’s word on spiritual gifts.

In addition see 1 Timothy 5:17-20 [ruling well and being accountable], Titus 1:5-9 [being above reproach means that your character and reputation are so well established in you, in the church, and in your society that anyone who accuses you first discredits himself], Acts 15:1-23 [notice here the prominence given the elders compared to the apostles, even though the apostles were those who had been with Jesus!!].

25. B. E. speaks of the resurgence of fatherhood in all areas, and that the Muslim influence in that direction may be contributing to it. He mentions particularly those coming out of prison, where they have been converted to the Wahabi sect of Islam. At the same time, he says, the resurgence of fatherhood seems to be coincident with an increase in popularity of country music, patriotism, and fathers returning from duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. Those fathers missed their children and those children missed their fathers, thus feeding the resurgence. And, that the ex-soldiers were toughened [read in this case “made into men”]. It’s difficult to know which caused which, but the Lord was behind it.

26. How to improve your enjoyment of others: Learn to see things from others’ point of view. No need to join them there, but it is good to understand where they have been and how they have come to their life’s present position and condition. If they are your kids, especially adult kids, you may have to guard against pride [taking too much of the credit], condemnation [blaming them for all of their frailties], or self-condemnation [taking too much of the blame]. Understanding others life-pilgrimage increases the compassion segment of my love for them whether or not I agree with their religion, politics, or life-style.