THOUGHTS OF JUNE, 2020

1. Why did the Lord give Moses the law, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?” That seems like an ungodly law to most of us who have accepted Jesus’ law of love and forgiveness. That was one of the laws He had given to Moses, but when He came to earth, He improved upon it – Matt. 5:38-39.

Well, I was not there with Moses, but the law given to him was a vast improvement over that which the world and God’s people were living under until that time. Their retributions had been limited only by their anger, imagination and ability. If someone stole your goat, you raided him and stole his herd of goats. If someone killed your servant, you wiped out his village. Escalation was the “I’ll show you” measure of getting even. Anything less was not satisfying in the least.

So, the law of “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” was benevolent, ground-breaking and necessary. Even today we follow that law, because we have (?) civil laws that are just and designed to balance the punishment with the crime, and civil laws are ordained by God to hand out earthly punishment – Rom. 13:1-5.

1. “Coincidences are God’s ways of being anonymous.” – Albert Einstein.
2. This is a teaching on prayer. First read Isaiah 50:4 with personal application. Although we have heard that there is nothing good in our flesh [Rom. 7:18], and that of myself I can do nothing [John 5:30] we are still trying to improve our flesh and use it to do something! We are taught to perfect our flesh and to try harder, including in prayers if we are Christians. That’s like blind people groping for help in a dark vacuum, and I want to address it. This will not be a complete teaching on prayer, but I want to speak about a certain type of fleshy prayer.

It is deceptive, but even prayer can be wasteful, counter-productive actions of our flesh. Many times in scripture, the Lord told His people that He was no longer listening to their prayers for help. He even told them He was tired of their prayers, and that they needed to suffer the consequences of their self-will. Then He brought on those promised consequences. Their and our problem? We walk in the flesh; God’s solution, walk in the Spirit. By that Holy Spirit, Paul wrote: “Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.” I think we do a lot of fleshy praying, in ignorance.

How to identify the difference!? Simply and humbly walk before the Lord, making no provision for the flesh, meaning “starve it” [the flesh] – Rom. 13:14. That is a challenging answer. Our flesh wars against making no provision for the flesh. We are always making provision for the flesh, and have been taught to do it from our youth. Don’t you feel your flesh at war in your soul, at least occasionally? “Not fulfilling our desires” is no answer to anyone who is very much alive to himself. Alive-to-self people seek other answers, and find them; and continue walking in their flesh. Walking in the Spirit has few answers to alive-to-self people – including for us Christians, because all of the Lord’s answers lead us to our crosses.

In my life as a Family Physician, I had many occasions to redirect good Christian patients from what they had been taught in family and church, toward the simple truth of Jesus. For example, Jesus invited us to come to Him, and receive from Him. That is so very easy that even a child can do it. But if we don’t understand the Lord, and are thinking of ourselves, we develop long lines of seekers with few receivers.

Coming to Jesus is more, in fact, other than, presenting our needs and desires to Him, and then saying that we are doing it for His sake. Coming to Jesus means laying aside our fears and “investments” in receiving, opening our souls to Him to deal with any area of our lives that He wants, and listening and yielding to Him. That sort of coming and asking closes the mouths of lions. But that approach is difficult on our flesh, especially when we are really needy and very distressed, and focused on the Big ME. We want to pray and get on with it, not face lions. Our need may be very important to us and others, so we are pressed to come straight to the point and present our petition. Coming to Jesus may also mean laying aside our customs of prayer in order to be childlike and simple. We need to talk to Him, humbly.

Prayer is first and always very personal with the Lord. Our approach is to first express our love and trust in the Lord, even if we aren’t going to get the answer we want. [Job: “Even though He slays me, I will trust Him.”]. Always ask what we can do for Him today, then listen. That type of prayer can be either totally devastating or totally life-giving to a dedicated, time-limited prayer meeting. When we ask Him, and we listen, the Lord may say to not pray for that healing or financial need. To be able to hear Him give that sort of answer requires a peaceful desire for the Lord’s will to be done, not our will.

We have a lot invested in our prayers – time, people, prestige. Besides, we may have just preached a sermon on “Jesus Heals” and invited the congregation to come forward for healing. The religious pressure is on. Can we hear Him if He says He is using some painful situation to work righteousness and wonders in our nation, or in a beloved person, and that the prayed for results will not come for years? If we can hear that, we are close to receiving His help.

Jesus wants to act among His people, but He will not be used. He is the Lord, not us. So, what to do? This is a wide-open matter and lots can be said. First let’s get simple and direct. Our service to the Lord and others needs to be simple and Jesus-focused. But, as said, the focus has become self-focused.

Example testimony: An old fellow with a history of long years of heavy smoking, now with permanent lung disease, came to the clinic to see me for the first time. He had breathing trouble. I checked him over, told him the simple truth that he had bad lungs from smoking, and needed to stop the habit. He said, “Oh, doc, I’ve tried that lots of times but always failed. I can’t stop smoking.” That was more of a contrite confession than a simple statement.

With my hand on his shoulder, I said, “I know that, but I have good news for you. I’m going to pray for you, and I’ll ask Jesus to set you free from smoking.” He said [not having heard the difference between what I said and that which he had heard many times over his years], “But, doc, I can’t stop smoking.” My response was, “That’s not what I said. I said I was going to ask Jesus to stop your smoking. You smoke all you want; we know you can’t stop. We are asking Jesus to set you free from the smoking habit. Do you understand?” It was as if a bright light went on in his soul, and slowly he said two words, “Yeah, doc.” He had just then heard the gospel. This time it had been human-spoken and Spirit-planted in his soul.

With my arm around his shoulders, I prayed a short prayer thanking the Lord for bringing us together with Him [Jesus], acknowledging that our prayer was being heard and answered, and that we asked Jesus to do the job all by Himself, while keeping my brother’s hands off of the problem. I gave him a follow-up appointment after reminding him again not to try to stop smoking.

A month later he was back. He was like a younger man. He was alive, not wheezing. His testimony was that for three days after leaving the clinic he had not even once thought of smoking. When he realized that, he threw away his cigarettes. With the confidence of true faith, He told me, “Doc, I’m never going to smoke again!” That was godly confidence, not a promise to try harder. The key to his healing was his being freed from the focus on and limitations of his flesh, so he could now listen to and trust Jesus. Read Isaiah 50:4 again.

That type of testimony was repeated many times over the years. The Lord wants us to come to Him, learn what He wants to do, then ask and let Him do what He wants. Eternal changes are made during that process. That’s why He personally and perfectly designs every person’s life process. Don’t forget why Lazarus died [John 11:4 – “This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.”]. If you are to be involved in that which the Lord is doing, do get involved, but remember that the Lord has His purposes and He is totally unlimited. Our well-intended efforts and good works are no substitute for Him, His plans, His power. In fact, sometimes our further involvement may obscure or prevent His actions.

Example testimony: A young lady, probably age 18, active in the street drug culture [and looking it in every way], came to the clinic for treatment of multiple abscesses on her arms, the sites of drug injections and infections. While I was treating them, I told her about an entirely different life, a life lived in fellowship with the Lord and His people. I also gave her an open invitation to come be part of my family if she wanted to lay down her life and live for Jesus. When I had completed treating her arms, I took her hand and prayed for her, asking the Lord Himself to speak to her, stating in my prayer, “Lord, one word from You and she will never be the same.” When I was through, she left.

A year later, having long since forgotten the encounter, I walked into an examining room to examine a pert, radiant young lady who held out her bare arms and said, “Look, I’m clean!” I knew what she meant, that she had no evidence of drug injections on her arms. I felt that I should remember her, but confessed that I did not. She related her one previous visit, when I had treated her abscessed arms, and that after my prayer she had left thinking, “You were the kookiest doctor in the world.”

She said she had gone home that day, filled her syringe with drugs, and was about to inject when, “A voice said, ‘No, not anymore.’” She continued, “I knew that voice did not come from the radio or T-V. I laid down my syringe and have not taken any more drugs of any kind. I have been living for the Lord, and wanted you to know.” The key to her soul was the Lord’s voice and what He said – which she thought was kooky, until she heard Him say it. Again, Isaiah 50:4.

An important thing in the Old Testament that is often missed: The Lord Himself drove out many of the nations that possessed the Promised Land, and the scriptures say so. At those times, He used the Israelite armies to do only certain things, such as mop-up. That was actually common, although at other times He had them do some heavy fighting. He still does that today! [Israeli soldiers testified to me of that having happened before their eyes in the 1967 Six-Days War.] He does things Himself, things usually initiated by us at His direction, but we have wrongfully learned that unless we do everything, nothing will happen. That mistaken theology works well in a task-oriented society of shallow belief, where it does produce lots of our good works, but not enough of God’s obvious glory and bigger works.

But the Living God has engineered world and personal finances, medical conditions, and all manner of circumstances in peoples’ lives in order to bring matters to a head, and then us face to face with Him, so He can change people and things, including bringing us to the end of our fleshiness. If we will walk humbly with Him, living and praying as He directs, we will find ourselves walking in the Spirit, and the Lord will show openly that He is the Lord.

1. This Thought is a teaching about the War Against Spirit-led Ministry. Its somewhat hidden point is that the Spirit-led life is the normal, confident, peaceful Christian life, which is not a constant battle shouting or struggling against the devil. There are times for hard and fast work, for shouting in Spiritual battle, but mostly it is walking humbly before God and man. The Spirit-led life is a life of being spiritually prepared internally and equipped so that we can stand close to the Lord and enjoy His victories – Eph. 6:11.

The Rev. Cecil Kerr died in 2010. He was a Church of Ireland Anglican [cpr. American “Episcopal”] minister in Northern Ireland. He was not only a Christian brother but a personal friend. I want to tell you about my friend, Cecil, beginning with some things said at his funeral.

Cecil’s bishop gave the funeral address, saying: “Cecil Kerr was a unique person with a unique ministry at a uniquely important period in Irish history. He has left behind him a heritage which is beyond description, and indeed a heritage which lasts into eternity.

“Cecil’s life was transformed by an experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit in the early [19]70s while he was chaplain in Queen’s University. That was to change his entire direction in ministry. Up to then he was simply a very able, articulate ordained minister with a great future before him in the church. After that, he was a visionary – risk-taking and ground-breaking, prepared to go wherever God might lead him, even at great sacrificial cost to his security, family and career. He never sought for or was honored with any ‘titles’ in the Church of Ireland, but the honor of following his Lord was enough for him. He never became a bishop, but exercised oversight and influence way beyond any bishop and well beyond the Church of Ireland.

“Cecil will be remembered most specifically, and along with his beloved wife, Myrtle, for their leadership at the Christian Renewal Center in Rostrevor. In that house they created a community from across all the divides, welcoming people from North, South, East and West and well beyond this island, no matter who they were or what church they belonged to. In that place Catholic and Protestant met under the lordship of Christ, and discovered in worship a true and deep unity in the one Lord. It was a place way beyond its time, in the days when unity was a costly but wonderful vocation. Cecil deeply believed in the oneness of the Body of Christ and in the upbuilding gifting of the Holy Spirit in all the people of God, and lived out those priorities.”

I will stop quoting the bishop at that point but enlarge upon some of the bishop’s comments. I want to insert some of Cecil’s history into the Bishop’s story. He said that Cecil was transformed by an experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit in the early 1970s. Not informed such as by study or by learning a new theology, but transformed. An act of the Holy Spirit transformed Cecil. It was a personal gift from God; it was done by God, very personally.

That was an Acts chapter two experience. Jesus had told them, and 2,000 years later Cecil believed it for himself, that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and that with their transformation they would be witnesses for Him in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even in the remotest part of the earth. That same thing happened to Cecil, but instead of Cecil going out into the world, the Lord brought the world to Cecil.

Now I will tell you how I came to know Cecil Kerr. Remember that we are talking about Spirit-led ministry and how our and others best religious human flesh would war against Spirit-led ministry. My story about Cecil and me is about a succession of victories over the world, the flesh and the devil [breaking with the flesh and going with the scripture by the Spirit]. You may notice about ten of them in the next eight paragraphs.

It started when I attended a prayer meeting at a Catholic convent in Houston. Almost all of the nuns were from Ireland, where the Catholic-Protestant strife was causing hundreds of deaths per year, and lots of other injuries and damage. It had been going on for a few hundred years and had no signs of ending. Brothers and sisters, if you want to see the Lord start something real, give yourself to being answers to Jesus’ prayers, such as in John 17.

When I left the prayer meeting that night, I had caught the burden of those dear nuns for the Lord to do something about what they called “the troubles.” Question: What goes on in you when you get a burden from the Lord? As for me, I want to give myself into the burden. I want to “be there,” to “join myself to them or it” in some helpful way. Remember John 3:16?

After a few days of prayer, I knew that the Lord wanted me to go to Northern Ireland, the mainly Protestant six-county nation, located north of the 26-county nation of the Republic of Ireland, which itself is mainly Catholic. The two nations make up the Island of Ireland.

My usual partner in travel ministry, Bob West, was also called to go. We invited a young Episcopal minister in our church, Jeff Schiffmayer, to go with us, and he accepted.

The Lord did many wonderful things while we were there, but I will focus only on the Lord and Cecil Kerr during that visit to Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1971.

When the Lord sends you somewhere, He also prepares those where He has called you. So, Cecil had a dream one night. In it, he was walking along a broad sidewalk approaching three Yanks. The middle Yank had on clerical garb – typical white collar and black garb. In the dream the Lord said to Cecil, “Listen to them.” See Acts 10:1-6.

The very next day after his dream, the three of us Yanks were in Belfast walking along a broad sidewalk, with Jeff in the middle wearing his clerical garb, approaching a similarly dressed clergyman, who we easily noticed was smiling broadly at us. It was Cecil Kerr. After a quick round of introductions, Cecil asked, “What are you doing here in Belfast?” We answered briefly that we were sent to share our testimony of life together in the Body of Christ. Cecil asked, “Will you talk to us in the Student Center?” That was right there on the sidewalk, one minute after we had met him.

We did, several nights. Each time, the Spirit fell on all of us. There was repentance, weeping, confession, prayer for the Spirit’s calling and anointing, commitment, and joy. Before we left Belfast, we invited Cecil to come to Houston to visit our church. He did, staying for several months, drinking in the experience of everyday Life in a living Body of Christ.

He returned to Northern Ireland, remained 3 more years at the Student Center, then started his renowned Christian Renewal Centers, where the Holy Spirit again replicated the living Body of Christ as in the Book of Acts.

Cecil Kerr’s anointed ministry was an important instrument in the Lord’s hand for halting the Catholic-Protestant troubles in Northern Ireland. But let me give you a broader picture of the Northern Ireland battlefield in that war [and there is yet more that could be and has been told]. At our visit, Cecil and those students were baptized in the Holy Spirit, and a tremendous spiritual revival broke out on the campus of Queen’s College in Belfast.

Cecil was their shepherd in the Student Center for about three more years and was immersed in spiritual life as he had never imagined, but had read of in the New Testament. As those students graduated, they took the revival back to their homes and counties, spreading the revival across Northern Ireland. I know of no definite measure of that spread of the Northern Ireland revival, compared to the report of Cecil’s ministry as given by the bishop and others at Cecil’s funeral.

My point for us is that there is a spiritual life and kingdom and war going on. If we are in it, we know it. If we are not in it, we may not even know about it, thinking all is intellectual, emotional, financial, religious, human and unfortunately only historical. When we live, and walk, and talk, and pray, and sing, and minister and war in the Spirit, Jesus has the on-flowing victory. But, when we live, walk, talk, pray, sing and minister in even the best of our natural religious flesh, we struggle even to accomplish our good plans, to keep our religious noses above water, and to have adequate resources for the ministry of the church.

Life and Power are in the Spirit. And it’s all about Jesus. It’s not even about the church, the bride of Christ, that He and we love. It’s all about Jesus, and to our hurt we focus on other good things and people instead of Jesus. We lose our victorious positions in battle when we do that, and may not even get into the real war.

I want to add this. We don’t work for the church; we work for Jesus. We don’t preach the church; we preach Jesus. We don’t pray to the church [or any person in it, past or present]; we pray to Jesus. Saints, look about at the buildings of the churches. They are closing and being sold, but the people who are Jesus’ church are breaking down the gates of hell. This is entirely a spiritual problem; not a financial problem, not a church location or publicity problem, not any sort of business problem – only a spiritual problem. Jesus’ church all over the world is breaking down the gates of hell, while that which is called His church is suffering loss and defeat.

This past weekend we celebrated the feast of Pentecost, the outpouring of the life and power of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Acts chapter two. Cecil Kerr had that happen to him, and his bishop testified that it changed Cecil’s direction in ministry, then described that change in direction as much more than change in direction, that Cecil became a visionary, a risk-taker, a ground-breaker, who was ready to go wherever God might lead him, even at great sacrificial cost to his security, family and career. Cecil re-established the truth and manifestation of God’s family, Christ’s Body, between people who for centuries had been separated over insolvable differences.

Cecil reestablished the church! How? He re-founded the church on its one foundation, Jesus Christ – 1 Cor. 3:11 (10-15). Cecil’s focus was on Jesus by the power of God’s Holy Spirit. All else is wood, hay and stubble, and is being burned. Brothers and sisters, it’s all about Jesus. If we are not about re-establishing the church, but are working on establishing our idea of church in our segment of the church, we are weakening the Body of Christ, working against God’s master plan, which is to answer Jesus’ prayer spoken on the night before He was arrested – that we would all be united like He was united with His Father.

The Lord sees the problem [and our indifference] and He convicts the convictable. The devil sees it too, but he definitely will not do anything to disturb the status quo [he is the deceiver who brought us to this place and keeps us in it]. It is important that we see the problem, and ask the Lord to give us our share of His burden. He is unlikely to anoint us to continue doing our own thing.

PRAYER: Father, hear us. We are available for battle. We want to join ourselves to those of different Christian labels whom you have made to be our brothers and sisters. Forgive our stubbornness. Speak to us and we will be changed forever. Praise you, Lord. Amen.

1. Remember the value to us of the Old Testament. Those things happened to God’s people for our sake, and then were recorded for our sake – Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11; 2 Tim. 3:14-17. We are blessed as we read and perceive those “for our sake” things. Examples: Ezekiel 21:3 shows that bad things happen to good people, which Jesus repeated in Luke 13:1-4. Although it is good for us to search our souls and deeds when life gets tough, if all of our tough times were chastisements for every sin or weakness, life would be a series of justly deserved punishments.

Recall therefore that Job’s trials were also for our sake, not only his, so the Lord could display His keeping power over us in this world and eternally. And, the Lord had it recorded that Job’s trials were also for the Lord’s sake! Of course, that is the central truth to all of life. All is for the Lord’s sake. We are blessed by being loved and included in His plans, like pre-planned tag-alongs being prepared for adult sonship.

1. As you know, scripture says much about hearing the Lord and knowing His will. Here are a few choice selections for your edification and enjoyment:
2. If anyone is willing to do God’s will, he will know God’s will – John 7:17.
3. God leads and teaches the humble, those who fear Him – Ps. 25:9, 14.
4. The devious are an abomination to the Lord, but He is intimate with the upright – Prov. 3:32.
5. The wicked will not understand, but the insightful will understand – Dan. 12:10.
6. Evil hearts do not want to hear the truth – John 3:21.
7. If you don’t hear God in Jesus, you have a problem – John 8:43-47.
8. I want to say that the church has about come through long days of little things, meaning that the Lord has intentionally been doing little things for some time. Some would fault the church for such littleness, but the Lord is ultimately running all these things. By and large, faithful people have had a difficult time settling for little things, little ministries, and little endings because little things are thought to be done by little people, and who [that is, in our flesh] wants to be a little person!? A nobody?

Well, Jesus had nowhere to lay His head [no house, no wife, no servants, no public or religious office] and He often slept in the open. Sounds like a street person, doesn’t it. And that is one of His examples for us [not that we must always sleep out of doors]. As the Son of God, He lived His ministry-years with and gave Himself to nobodies and sinners, who became God’s choice for apostles of the faith. That is another, and important, example for us. It will go well for us if we perceive and accept His examples.

But, faith, mixed with our flesh [a condition we must live with for the remainder of this earth-life], urges us to do great things for God!, during which we can miss doing all those little things for Him that He wants us to do. I’m glad that He occasionally gives us big things, but today I’m referring to those good, big, fleshy things that are not God’s plan for us. So, from time to time we do those big things which are “nothing” to the Lord and will be “nothing” when all of our works are added together in eternity and presented to Him. They are “good,” often produced by great effort and expense on our part, and that’s the end of them! Recall Matthew 7:21-23.

But the things that are big in God’s eyes are often little in man’s eyes, even in the eyes of the church, even in the eyes of believers. Some examples:

1. Gideon called for an army. 32,000 men responded. The Lord had Gideon reduce that number to 300. That was less than 1% of the available number. Why? Because, for God, thousands were too many, because Israel would become boastful, saying “My own power has delivered me.” [That’s one of my battlegrounds. When the Lord does something and has me tag along with Him, I start taking credit for it.] Gideon and the 300 won their God-directed, God-empowered battle, and God got the credit. That sounds great to us for Gideon, but our flesh fears it and wants to leave like Gideon’s 99 %. We don’t want to fight battles that appear to be impossible, do we? Thus, we are spiritually “out of shape” when we are cornered and have to fight the uphill battles. Let’s stop rejecting our battles when He presents them to us. Like David did with Goliath, walk straight into them.

1. The Lord originally chose Israel, “.. because you were the fewest of all peoples” – Deut. 7:7. He wanted to show His mighty hand, His redemptive power, His enduring love to a thousandth generation. He has not changed. He still chooses nobodies, few people, little people, but sometimes we respond like Israel sometimes did, like it is our fight [and run] or it is the Lord’s fight [and we won it]! When we do that, we are losers.

So, the Lord has an ongoing problem. When He selects us, His nobodies, we tend to think of ourselves as then being somebodies. The apostle Paul said he was one of those, because he had been a real somebody, then was chosen by God, and he had to humble himself to become a nobody. We are somebodies to the Lord, but we are not good at simultaneously being somebody to Him and nobody to ourselves.

David is a good example of one who had constant battles and mostly victories in this somebody/nobody soul contest. David was the least in his family. For years, before he became king of all Israel, he was humbled and chased about the countryside by King Saul and the army of Israel. He was a hunted criminal, a nobody, and refused to become a somebody when he had unrighteous opportunities to do so [by killing King Saul and becoming king himself]. And David as a teenager had already been anointed king of Israel by Samuel, the prophet sent to do so by the Lord!! David’s biggest flesh battle all of his life was to remain little, as the Lord built David’s kingdom, making David a real somebody.

So, David was a confident nobody who was growing in righteousness, faith and popularity with the right people, meaning God and selected men and women. David was seeking his kingdom [his ministry, his calling] but in a manner that enabled His God to give it to him. Jesus !!! said, “But seek God’s kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom” – Luke 12:31-32. The Little Flock principle was in effect long before Jesus said it 1,000 years after David’s time, and it is still in effect 2,000 years after He said it during His years on earth. Much passes away but not the Lord and His word.

At the top I said that we are coming through a time of little things. Little things can be done faithfully only by little people. Big people are interested in big things, and have a hard time doing little things and going through times of little things. Big people are compelled to devise big things. Little things are “nothings” to big people. If we don’t see ourselves as little people, we will plot to become big people, to do big works for the Lord, and ask His blessing on them. Or, we will despair of our littleness and apparent lack of success. But when we see ourselves as little people, we and the Lord will do great things, even greater than Jesus did.

We cannot read the Beatitudes without getting a dose of littleness – poor in spirit, mourning, gentleness, hunger and thirst for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted for righteousness sake – all the while rejoicing, knowing we are the ones the Lord is using to salt the earth, and to light up the world. Isn’t that great?!

Jesus’ life and words call us to humility, which is the central character trait of little people. Zechariah spoke by the Spirit, saying, “.. not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord.” I want to say this, because it is very important: We are in the days of little things, compared to the Lord’s greatest promises to the church on earth. We do not need to be ashamed of not doing the mightier deeds of Jesus. We can fit in with the Lord’s plans for the present time, let Him minimize us a bit [or more than a bit], be faithful, and rejoice with our little things. That’s a good way to be ready for bigger things that are on the way.

As we have all experienced, He will often seem to be doing nothing at all, perhaps with a scattering of little things, and then He will occasionally do mighty things. That has always been the pattern in the lives of His prophets, apostles, and other little people. Lord, help us to think well of ourselves as your little, humble people.

1. An overcomer does not deny the existence of an enemy, and he does not deny that the enemy can do evil acts to him and others, but he does deny that the enemy can do anything that the Lord God does not perfectly plan and intend for perfect purposes. The Lord is the only one who knows what is good for Him, for us, and for the world. Righteous Job knew that, as he endured a God-orchestrated trial. Some enlightened Christians have a difficult or impossible time agreeing with that statement, but it is true. If we do not see it, the smallest thing will quickly distract or subdue us. If you see it, nothing can defeat you. Another definition of an overcomer is that the fires of life have no power over them.

The difference between victory and defeat is not in what the devil is doing or the direction our lives are going, but in what we see when we look. Do we see the Lord at work? Yes, we are surrounded by the enemy but the enemy is also surrounded -- by the army of God. Overcomers do not see as others see; that’s why they overcome. Their seeing is not of themselves; it is of the Lord. Elisha’s servant looked and said, “Alas.” Elisha looked and said, “Fear not” – 2 Kings 6:15-16. What a contrast. Both faced the same problem, but their difference was in what they saw. It is not a matter of what we are going through, but whether our eyes are open. Lord, open our eyes that we may see. The One who is with us is greater than those who are against us. Holy Spirit, lead us into this truth. Show us that we are seated together with Jesus Christ in the heavenlies. Deliver us from looking at things from ground level only.

1. Here is another testimony/teaching by your co-reader, A. H. Enjoy him with me.

“If somebody had asked me the day before I became a Christian how to get to heaven I would have said, “Don’t do bad stuff (murder, stealing, etc.) and perhaps go to church.” If I were asked what were my chances of making it with those qualifications, I would have tried to justify myself and probably point to many others worse than me. I had been taken to church and attended Sunday school, although I stopped at the age of about 16, determined never to return.

“I was going to be a doctor and was in the first semester of Medical school. Doctors help people. That would put me in good with God. I was not so bad and was a fairly normal member of society.

“Then I went off to a drinking party and met the Lord. If I were asked the same question [about going to heaven] the next day, I would have said, ‘I have asked Jesus into my life. I had nothing to give and He saved me despite the fact I was totally undeserving. He lifted the boulder of sin that weighed me down and set me free. He gave me eternal life.’ There was none less deserving of salvation in that moment than me. I had no hope, was desperate, and He did it all.

“It took me a bit by surprise to discover that I was still sinning after that. ‘How could I sin when He had done so much for me?! If I kept this up, I would be in danger of losing His wonderful gift,’ I thought. How could God go on forgiving my bad behaviour? And that was only about the sins I was aware of. I struggled (and sometimes still do: ‘How could I have done such a thing?’...) with earning His ongoing approval and making myself acceptable to Him by avoiding sinning. I was still totally undeserving of His ongoing grace and forgiveness. Only somebody who loves me very much could continue to put up with my sin. Only He does.

“For many years my spiritual life was more or less governed by avoiding sin as best I could. I failed, as the devil would frequently remind me, and he was right. I would sheepishly creep back to the Lord and ask for forgiveness, which sometimes I had difficulty accepting. ‘Is this all it is?’ I asked myself. ‘There must be something more.’ I did not want to presume on the forgiveness and mercy of God, but He forgave me on my repentance and I vowed I would try harder, only to fail on some other point (worse still, the same one). I think I viewed God as a great angry policeman in the sky who was just waiting for the next time I sinned to point it out, and the process would repeat. My behaviour was a lot different from before I was a Christian but sin still plagued my life. I was trying to earn my salvation by not sinning, much as I would have done prior to rebirth. I am totally undeserving of this forgiveness.

“I am not sure quite when, but over the years I have come to experience that my relationship with the Lord is not based on my behaviour and the avoidance of sin. Its foundation is the eternally completed work of Jesus. I have nothing to add or contribute to that foundation. To do so would suggest there is something lacking in His work. At best, that is ridiculous; at worst, blasphemous. He is cultivating our relationship in His infinite love.

“As for my soul, I cannot change myself. Only God can do that. Sin is very much a side issue (albeit an important one). Augustine’s exhortation to ‘Love God and sin boldly’ has always been a difficult one for me, but I am beginning to appreciate its wisdom. God will bring to our attention sin which has to be dealt with, but He will also provide His answer. He may need to take us through the consequences of our sin, but only for our benefit, and He is with us. He may need to chastise us for our sin, but His punishment is not vague or random. It is always just, appropriate, limited and clear. In the meantime, we fly to the cross for forgiveness, stand up in His strength and march on.

“As for the future, I am sure I will continue to sin because I am a saved-by-grace sinner. The cross is always available and the Lord is not surprised by my sinning. He has the only remedy for sin and it is completely effective. He does not withhold His remedy, nor is He reluctant to provide His cleansing. He is aiming for my perfection which will be achieved progressively here and in eternity.

“We are totally undeserving -- past, present and future, of anything the Lord gives us. Let us love Him with all we are. When we sin let us use God’s remedy of repentance and contrition before the cross and receive His forgiveness. He will lead us in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”

1. At best, religion is a way of ordering [arranging] our spirituality. But the Holy Spirit is Lord and will not be arranged. So, where does that leave me and my religiosity?
2. If you have read my book, God’s Doctor, you know that as soon as the Lord grabbed hold of me and baptized me with His Holy Spirit, He began to show me how His being with me could impact the kingdom of this world [in my case, the medical institution’s approach to and methods of patient care]. I [and my clinic staff] received lots of positive notoriety from the press, the medical establishment, and television. Then I left to promote kingdom of God life, at times doing no, little or lots of medical work.

Let’s do a bit of comparison of my personal scenario to the one of the disciples’ in scripture. In John 20:19-20 the resurrected Jesus gave His new commission to his disciples. After that, in chapter 21, the disciples went fishing and caught nothing. Then a strange and enlightening thing happened. Along came Jesus walking on the seashore. He told them to throw their nets into the water. They did, and they caught an enormous catch. Jesus with them produced remarkable results in their work in the kingdom of this world. It is a wonder that the disciples ever again quit being fishermen of fish.

But then Jesus commissioned Peter [and probably the others] to be a shepherd in his new calling instead of a fisherman in his old calling. It was one thing to help the world do better in what it was already doing, and another to be a worker in Christ’s kingdom, to know and teach and disciple others into being sheep in the new kingdom. Stating that more accurately, as God’s son, I followed the Lord’s call to do specifically that which He wanted me to do. In my case, I knew that my identity was “son of God,” not “anointed physician.” Obeying my Father is what I followed. So did Peter.

1. What do scripture and current events tell us about what is going on today? My answer is “Lots; much more than we may have noticed.” I’m not the only one who is asking, and offering answers to that question. Evil and hurtful things are happening everywhere, it seems. The distractor is at work and one thing he does not want us to know and live by is that the Lord’s hand is in and on it all.

A short list of current events informs us of upheavals on massive levels. 1) On the human behavioral level, I will simply call it anarchy and apostacy which are revealing our social, moral, and religious weaknesses. 2) On the financial level it is worldwide economic depression, unstable governments trying to print their ways out of financial problems. 3) On the nature level there are multiple types of natural disasters with the prospect of human-caused global warming being foremost on the minds of some. 4) On the political level it is one world governance as a set-up for loss of freedoms and the appearance of the anti-christ. 5) On the medical level it is plagues and epidemics. 6) On the religious level there is complacency, ignorance and division. It seems like every area of life in every area of the world is collapsing, or at least greatly deteriorating.

As to the cause of our deep and wide problems, it would not be enough to say, “The devil is doing it” and that we should simply “Resist him!” Indeed, resisting the devil is an ongoing action of the faithful. But, as much as some would not like to consider it, we must also seek answers to the greater question of, “What in all of this havoc is the Lord doing?”

The Lord and Master of all, who guides all things, in whose hands is all authority in heaven and on earth, the One in whom we trust “although He might slay us” [per Job in 13:15] – the One who died on the cross to give us eternal life and to restore all things – that One, the One who has pre-designed and pre-scheduled the accomplishment of all His purposes, is in this day [and as in every day of His creation] bringing His word to fulfillment. That One will not tell us everything He is doing, but He will inform His faithful ones of enough so that we can actually be children of His light, as He promised. We were not made to live in darkness, whether 6,000 years ago nor here in 2020. We are His people [by His grace], we have His printed word [He has seen to that], and we have His Spirit [as a gift]. We have insight and hope. We really don’t have to manufacture anything. Much is there for us that He wants us to search out. I will do some of that today.

Several times in the New Testament we are told that the things that happened to those Old Testament people of God happened to them for our benefit, and were recorded for our benefit. Let’s take that to heart and look at some of it. For example, when Israel became complacent, self-reliant, then rebellious, the Lord sent His prophets to them with corrective words. Sometimes they heard Him and changed their ways.

Other times they continued in their rebellion, and He brought tough times upon them – disasters, including financial, natural disasters, plagues, anarchy, bad kings, epidemics, civil wars, and nations that defeated them and carried them away into slavery. He told them aforehand that He would do those things, and as they occurred, He reminded them of the reasons for their disasters. And, He always reminded them that He would deliver them from their chastisements when they repented and turned back to Him.

As a side-lesson to us, the righteous suffered equally in almost all of those tough times with the unrighteous.

Now to our day, and “What is going on in this world?” We will go to scripture -- Romans chapter one:

 In verses 16 through 23 Paul and the Holy Spirit laid out for us the common sense principles and process of mankind’s governance by their Creator. They were: 1) Acceptance of the Creator’s lordship, 2) Learning the truths that are revealed about the Creator through that which He created, and 3) Gaining earthly and eternal life by believing and conforming to that which He reveals to us in creation. He then warned us against twisting or suppressing those easily discernable truths, because God’s wrath from heaven will come down on those who dishonor Him and violate His ways.

There would be three stages of decline as the Lord worked to turn His world back to Him.

 Stage 1 -- With those principles and processes for God’s governance established, and with some humans suppressing the obvious truths revealed in God’s creation, in verses 24 and 25 the Lord said that the next logical step for Him was to give them license to be sexually impure, or an ease and general acceptance of their iniquity. They had refused God’s truths so He removed inhibitions to that which was obviously and logically heterosexual sin. His people were then adrift and on their own in heterosexual sin matters. In America, this is what happened in the sexual revolution of the 1960s.

Here is a list of some of the inhibitions more greatly loosened at that time [you will notice that there is nothing new here, but that there was a general “loosening” of restraints beginning in the 1960s]:

1. Divorce
2. Adultery
3. Pre-marital sex
4. Free-love
5. Masturbation [fantasy]
6. Incest
7. Rape
8. Promiscuity
9. Sodomy [oral sex]
10. Pornography
11. Abortion
12. Sexual fantasy [T-V, magazines, books, movies]
13. Voyeurism [self-exposure]

I have done some of that, but have been cleansed, and so have you. Notice that that list is all heterosexual sins, but worse was to come after the 1960s in Stage 2.

 Stage 2 -- In verses 26 and 27 the plague of homosexuality was unleased on the world. In America that happened in the 1980s and 1990s. If you have any question of homosexuality being a sin, see God’s opinion in Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:8-11. In America, homosexuality [including lesbianism] has since been legalized and its acceptance has brought with it an abundance of other perversions, thus Stage 3.

 Stage 3 – The list of Stage 3 perversions is long because, after homosexuality, God gave society over to depraved minds [verses 28-32], meaning He again and this time absolutely loosened His restraints, which is where we are today. I will list only some of the manifestations of depraved minds:

1. Same sex marriage [legalized]
2. Transgenderism [normalization being demanded]
3. Polygamy [legalization being demanded]
4. Pedophilia [a form of homosexuality]
5. Prostitution [legal in areas, common in others]
6. Bestiality [legalization being demanded]
7. Bi-sexuality [being demanded]
8. Phone/T-V sex [easily available]

I am thankful for God’s grace, even during my ignorant years, that He kept me from that list, although there is forgiveness, cleansing and restoration for all sinners.

1. But I have been caught in the additional “depraved mind” sins listed in verses 29-32: All manner of unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful, and approvers of others who do things worthy of death. These long-common sins are being unleased and legalized, thought to be normal, and earthly laws are being changed to allow for and promote them.

So, have you noticed that the sin of homosexuality is not only a sin, but is a spiritual “line” beyond which the Lord judges a society, or judges the entire world? The flood gate against depravity was opened when homosexuality became acceptable.

Question: Looking at the world’s mess, what or who was responsible for the opening of that flood gate? Don’t say “God.” Don’t say “the devil.” We honestly can say “Us, the church.” Exactly like sin will be even more greatly released when the church is taken out of the world at the Rapture, the weakness [apostacy] of the church [who is God’s leaven in the world] was responsible for the perversity and anarchy we are experiencing today.

So, what is going on in this world today? Answer: The spiritual presence of God has diminished, and sin is filling the void. When the presence of the Lord is pushed away, He “willingly,” or perhaps we should say “reluctantly,” recedes into the background. When the church is weak, civilizations founded on Christian principles inevitably falter. For us, this present anarchy and apostacy may go on for a few more months or for 400 years as we begin to experience being a minority, even a persecuted, enslaved minority. We have rejected the Lord, He whom we know is alive, and we have decided that He should not reign over us! Bless us, yes; but obey Him, no. [In the testimony of a race riot in Beaumont, Texas in the 1930s, there was one big riot for days. It was settled by one Texas Ranger in one day. Notice the spiritual difference between then and now in Seattle and other cities, where sections of town were turned over to rioters for days and weeks as the police hid out.]

Barring a time of respite through God’s grace and our repentance, this is a time when we should expect things to only get worse. During this time, the faithful ones among us will: 1) bind the wounds in the church, especially of those who in times past we would rather not bind. 2) Stop reading the Bible, but start studying it so we will in all ways become approved by God. That means we will become knowledgeable of the Bible and will live it, thus not being ashamed on that coming day, because we will have applied what we read – 2 Tim. 2:15. 3) Give sinners a chance. Don’t be a coward. Speak the truth about sin. Then testify to Jesus who will deliver them from sin, like He delivered us from our sin. That is loving sinners. 4) Stop devising “ministries.” Instead, open up our personal lives to the needy so the Lord can draw them to us and into Jesus. That is how true ministries are begun. We are their lights; He is their Savior.

1. It is not a new thought that the church has the keys to the kingdom of God. A question can be asked, “What are those keys?” Well, keys are for unlocking and locking doors. Locked doors obstruct passage or movement of people [brotherhood, unity], thoughts [deception], knowledge [biblical ignorance, spiritual revelation], action [revival], and other Holy Spirit assignments.

Essentially, it is the authority of a steward to manage the Lord’s household. That puts us in the position of responsibility, doesn’t it. We don’t want to be like the Pharisees who failed to use those keys for themselves or others. When we live faithfully, we bind and loose as an extension of the Lord in heaven.

We, the church, are to lead forward in this world under the direction of the Lord, with authority. We are His ruling body, and how we handle that decides much of how it will be for us to be one of His overcomers who will rule with Jesus in the next presentation of His soon coming kingdom on earth.

So here are some areas we can use to check ourselves out. Righteous, reliable, orderly: 1) Family life – father, mother, children while still living at home, then as single adults, then as married adults. 2) Civil life – both leading and following in organized society. 3) On the job – Being an integral, positive part of the workforce. 4) Church – Fulfilling spiritual roles and tasks, obeying spiritual rulers. Those things should be clear evidence of our use of those keys.

1. At times do you surprise yourself, then say, “Why did I do [or say] that?” I usually ask myself, “Where did that come from?” We don’t completely understand ourselves and our patterns, which are both positive and negative. Although most of them come from our childhood upbringing, after walking with the Lord for a while they come from the Lord, from our life in God’s family. We begin to behave like a child of God.

My point is that we behave like and see ourselves like we think our heavenly Father is and sees us, and like we think He wants us to behave. Having the right impression of God is important, and it is variable from person to person, and religious community to religious community, and nation to nation. We can be strict and easily angered if our earthly father was abusive, or graceful and merciful if we had a proper earthly father. Thankfully, there is an abundance of heavenly Father imagery in the church.

1. There are some things that we just don’t have. Some of those things are “answers,” some are “abilities.” We usually become oblivious to the multitude of inadequacies in our lives, and sort of compromise in our ignance by staying within recognized human bounds instead of fighting and usually losing. Our answer: We need a source from outside us.

Some of that outside resource is other people, but then soon we come up against another and immovable wall that really shows our inadequacy. Our resource then is only the Lord. To receive from Him is costly -- submission, humility and other painful humilities to our flesh.

This has broader application than we may think. I’m not speaking of only our salvation, but of science and other natural matters and things in between. On our own we cannot move spiritual forces, nor save or love or forgive. In fact, we rely on the Lord for everything, or else risk living weak and anemic lives, and dying early – 1 Cor. 11:30. Such is the common and accepted situation of much of humanity. Something better is now available.

1. Paul’s lofty but attainable purpose in the church was stated in Colossians 1:28; “We proclaim Him [Jesus], admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete [perfect] in Christ.” That was Paul’s common, everyday project. It was then and now still is the success mark of every ministry of the church, family, church camp, Sunday School class, etc.

Complete and perfect means having reached the full measure of the purpose for which a person was created. A special needs person can be perfect; a high school athlete can be perfect; a doctor can be perfect; a farmer can be perfect; a teacher can be perfect – all of them without being absolutely perfect like Jesus is perfect. It has to do with maturity in the situation of life in which we are, not with ultimate perfection. Until then we are children, not fully formed but hopefully on the way.

1. Jesus of Nazareth was not entirely who He appeared to be – He was much more than He appeared to be. Yes, He was that baby born in Bethlehem, the kid raised in Nazareth, the earth-born son of Mary who was the wife of Joseph. He was “fully-human in body and soul.” Yet, the Spirit in that “fully-human body and soul” was the eternal Son of God, not a human spirit as in everyone else. Once again, since the time of Adam’s fall, in Mary’s womb human flesh and God’s Spirit were united [or yoked] in that one body and soul as one person – Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. But there had to be a working together of that combination. It was not to be automatic. The prophets had spoken of the Spiritually anointed Human to come, and there were questions like, “How can that be?” and “How will it work out?” And there would be challenges, because the more intensive questions would come from those with religious, very natural, thus limited understanding.

Jesus referred to His Spirit and flesh as being yoked, that His being yoked produced rest for Him as it would also for us born-again human people, and that He is the gentle and humble teacher who offers to yoke us, and then to teach us how to labor under our yokes so our labors will be easy and light. That sounds really good, whatever it fully means. Three things are clear: 1) Receiving God’s Spirit supplies lost humanity with our missing ingredient, the eternal essential, 2) Going to Jesus to have that Spirit properly bound to our humanity is functionally necessary, and 3) Jesus’ classroom of His personal example and gentle personal mentoring is essential for learning how to succeed under the yoke. That’s what we are talking about today.

Let’s read Matthew 11:28-30: “Come to Me, all who are weary and heaven-laden [you are doing something wrong, your basics are unbalanced and working in opposition to one another], and I will give you rest [but I will not have you stop laboring]. Take My yoke upon you [all of My yoke, not one side of it] and learn from Me [and this is the focus of our lesson today], for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy [or comfortable] and My burden is light.” Clearly, Jesus says it is a matter of taking His yoke and learning from Him so that our life and labors will become as His. That’s more than good.

Allow me to point out a group of believers [meaning yoked ones] but who did not learn from Jesus. In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus said about them, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice iniquity [lawlessness].’” I think that is a picture of yoked ones [humans who received God’s Spirit] who did not come to Jesus to learn from Him, thus did not do the will of His Father.

I want to emphasize that Jesus is not offering us one side of the yoke and that He will pull on the other side. He is not offering to pull half of our load in order to make our labors and lives easier. No; He, our example of God’s Spirit within a human, had those two divergent forces yoked together in Him, and He is offering the same yoke to us who would labor in His fields. What were those two divergent things? They were his human, “son of Adam sonship” and eternal, “son of God Sonship.” He was [and still is] human and Spirit, as now also is every person who has born-again faith in Him. We are not “only human” and not “only spiritual,” but both in one person, and that is what we need yoking. We need to be one yoked human body and soul, comfortably and faithfully living full-time in the Spirit.

POINT: When we are born-again, we are yoked, but we need to be broken to the yoke. We need to learn from Jesus who endured and persisted, before we can become like Him. Being good is not enough, and being spiritual is not enough. Those two must be taught to abide together. Jesus said, “Apart from Me you can do nothing.” We have been yoked by Him, and need to abide in His classroom so we can learn how to live in the yoke. A young ox newly yoked is a pitiful sight, struggling against his new experience that restrains his independence and self-will.

I suppose it would be good to describe the alternative conditions of born-again but un-yoked Christians, if we can stand it. We can be carnal, religious [but true] believers or we can be shallow, spiritual [but true] believers. As usual, the worst of the two types is the one you are not.

1) The carnal religious [but true] believers have little spiritual strength or understanding, so they labor in obviously carnal [meaning natural, but not evil] ways to live their lives and serve the Lord. Working in a church program is more attractive than sacrificial living or praying for someone. The sacraments are more meaningful than prayer meetings. They understand scripture in the natural, but not well in its allegories and parables, certainly not the Book of the Revelation. If they are seriously religious, they suffer from overwork and religious fatigue.

2) The shallow spiritual [but true] believers lack foundation and substance in their spirituality. They know and use spiritual words but not much comes, at least consistently, of their spiritual positioning. Their lives are often shaky, despite flashes of spiritualities. Life’s frequent storms blow them off course. They seem to always be reaching for the unobtainable. To them, scripture is very allegorical and figurative. They try to believe for miracles, because they know they should. They suffer from spiritual fatigue because they labor hard for spiritual success.

I have painted the worst possible pictures I can of those beloveds, but they are real. The point of this lesson is that both of those groups are weary and heavy-laden. In Jesus’ earth-life He had those two conditions [humanity and spirituality] yoked into one human’s life, continually dependent upon and learning from His heavenly Father, which developed His identity and necessary eternal character as the Messiah. That is what He is offering us.

That is what Mary had that Martha did not have – Luke 10:38-42. Martha was distracted from being with Jesus because she was busy with all her good works. Jesus said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary [But that one thing will not get the work done. Faith needs work. – ed.], for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” Mary was sitting at Jesus feet, listening to and loving Him. A composite of Martha and Mary would be the perfect person – good works and warm relationship.

Jesus had that balance. He always “hung out” with His Father. Like Mary’s little example, He walked through life at rest, having peace in His soul, in fellowship with His Father – although He was frequently fatigued physically. He knew and lived the truth. [That’s what He was, after all – The Truth!] He benefitted from the truth because He believed it and applied Himself to trusting it, no matter the cost.

It is no surprise then that, since Jesus went through this process for Himself, and had personally achieved that essential united human godliness, that He now offers the same to those who need and want it – all need, some want. He wants to deliver us from religious fatigue and spiritual fatigue because they are toxic, even fatal. The opposite of toxicity is rest, and rest is the temporary cure for fatigue, whether it is physical or spiritual. Remember that we are to be diligent to enter and stay in that rest – Heb. 4:11.

Remember that Jesus did not offer us rest directly, but a yoke that would or could lead to rest in our learned “natural spirituality.” He calls us to Him, which requires a coming and a yielding on our part. We have to give up and be ready for whatever He does to and with us. That giving up is scary on the flesh, is it not? But He will meet us at the door as we come to Him. There in His hands is our yoke – not one for the two of us to share, but one for each one of us to accept entirely for ourselves as He yokes our humanity and our spirituality together into one Son of God-type person. Then we don’t have to settle for being “only human” and try at times to be “spiritual.” That is a form of spiritual schizophrenia which He will heal as we learn from Him.

After being yoked, begins our learning from Him. He said “First the yoke, then the learning.” He is the perfect Teacher, “gentle and humble,” and His teaching flows from His heart into our heart. In fact, as we begin to wear our yokes and follow Him, He keeps us in perfect peace, even as the world drives the spikes. Because our souls are at rest. His yoke has made life easy and our burdens light.

James, Jesus’ half-brother, was yoked and learned from Jesus. He could say, “Consider it all joy, by brethren, when you encounter various trials” – James 1:2. Something very good had happened to James. There is nothing better than genuine joy flowing from the soul of a believer in his trial. And it is an offer to whoever will come to the Teacher’s classroom.

R. C., an English brother with whom I have been very close for over half a century, has responded to the above after having heard me talk twice [about 50 years apart] on being yoked. I will tell you that he is a retired psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and psychotherapist who has been on a solid spiritual walk for over 50 years. I have long appreciated and benefited from his insights and clarity. The following is his response to my teaching on being yoked.

“I believe that teaching was important because it (the Holy Spirit did at the time by applying the word within me) set me free from a dangerous form of religious behavioral performance and showed me that my natural man and my spiritual man could be joined as one (as you are saying) in a way that enabled me to live and function in all realms of life equally or similarly. That said, I knew that it was the truth by my deep sense of conviction that it was so. I felt healed or integrated as a result.

“I stopped attempting to enter into or develop an altered other state of being, in a religious fashion. I started to be more comfortable. In that way my heavy-ladenness was relieved/lifted. At the same juncture you also said that that I should be the same person wherever I might be. The two went hand in hand in glove. It did not mean that I would be, as a result of the teaching, more sanctified or perfected. It could possibly look just the opposite to some! Sometimes we just don’t know why something is important, but my inner barometer then and yet says so.

“I have on a few occasions shared that word with Christians, including some high-ups, and it appears as though something falls from their eyes and they are amazed and relieved, and see it as true but shocked that they had not ever considered it that way. So what were they believing previously, and how was the other, more common interpretation affecting them in a way that seemed to be in need of correction? The yoking to Jesus probably sounds more spiritual, or is it religious? I think it has to do with the notion of a religious self “being yoked with Jesus,” sounding so dominant and powerful in religion. The teaching removed a burden of responsibility from my shoulders to accomplish what I could never have achieved.”

Thank you, R. C. If anyone wants to communicate with R. C., call or e-mail me and I will request his approval.

1. And finally, take heart as you see Jesus’ kingdom increasing and His peace reigning – Isaiah 9:7. If you don’t see it, pray for better vision. We are surrounded with the kingdom of this world and its evil workings, that is obvious, but surrounding that mess is the Lord’s army and He is winning. That is obvious. Because we know the end from the beginning, our stance is that He and we have already won!!

God is with us.