THOUGHTS of October, 2020

1. It has been noticed that when there is a squeeze on, such as a need or a shortage in the world or in the church, we tend to look for better methods for dealing with things. Methods may well need changing, but it is us, people, who are definitely in need of changing. “It’s me, it’s me, Oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer. Not my brother, not my sister, but it’s me, Oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer,” as the old spiritual goes. People are the Lord’s methods, and He will change us as we humble ourselves before Him and man, and seek His grace. The Lord is looking for better people and He is in the business of reducing and producing us from the garbage we were when He selected us.
2. For several months we have been looking at what I have simply called, “The condition of the church.” The teachings have been based primarily on my studies, observations and experiences, which I believe to be reliably based on a biblically informed, spiritually sensitive, moderately studied, and brotherly mind. I have a high level of trust in the Lord in my claim, but not 100% [because they are my claims], so I leave room for the perfect mind of Christ Himself, including through my brothers. Therefore, in this Thought we will delve into the Lord’s supply of reliable resources for the church, and consult with the Apostle John and the Lord Jesus as recorded in the Book of the Revelation in its first three chapters, although we will not complete those chapters in today’s Thought. Questions: How do you go about evaluating your thoughts and revelations? What is your usual level of confidence in them?

Rome was beginning to enforce the cult of emperor worship. Some in the church wanted to go along with Rome’s edict, but God gave grace for the church to hold fast to Him, meaning love and trust Him while not being rebellious against Rome. That was possible only because they had been transformed, not simply informed. They had been made one with Jesus Christ through His shed blood on the cross. They knew the story, that Jesus had walked the same road of peaceful disobedience; and they knew His redemptive, life-giving results. However, the flesh [Rome in this case] usually sees peaceful disobedience as rebellion, and Rome’s haughty flesh did not tolerate anything considered to be rebellion. Truly, we live in two vastly different kingdoms. Questions: When did you last go against the law of the state? Was it righteously done? How did you handle it before the Lord?

Jesus was the one and only Lord and, unknown to Rome, if its citizens followed Him they would have become better, not worse, citizens. But Rome required both complete obedience and complete recognition of its lordship. So, persecution and martyrdom began, as both Rome and the church stood firm. It was costly to the church, but it grew in righteousness and numbers, in quality and in quantity, until the testimony and blood of the saints had sufficiently converted and christianized that heathen society. That took 150 years of blood, faith and love, which encourages us. Right? Question: How about your applicable testimony?

For informational purposes – Jesus had been crucified in 34 A.D. Jerusalem had been destroyed in 70 A.D. John’s gospel was probably written around 85 A.D, his 3 epistles around 90 A.D., and The Revelation around 95 A.D. That is 25 years after the destruction of temple worship and 61 years since John last saw Jesus. John was aging, meaning not only older in years but becoming more ripe in his soul for being used by the Lord. [That’s good for us to remember, is it not? The form of our service may change, but its quality will improve. Selah.] Tradition has it that in his last years John was carried from Christian meeting to Christian meeting on a stretcher, sharing the life-giving message of, “Little children, love one another.” Question: Do you see your greater valuable to the kingdom of God now in your older age?

The Book of the Revelation shows Jesus among the churches [that’s chapter 1], the condition of the church during the church age [that’s chapters 2 and 3, some later Thoughts], then the terrible conflict as Satan pours out his wrath on the world, followed by the Lord ending the conflict by pouring out His wrath upon fully consummated sin. Just as in the Old Testament the Lord would not allow Israel to go to war against certain nations because “their sin [or iniquity] is not yet full [or complete]” [Gen. 15:16], so also the Lord will not bring His judgment against a sinful world until its sin is full [complete] to the top, leveled off and tamped down. Full measure of sin receives full measure of judgment. He is indeed patient, in matters small and great, in matters personal and those of worldwide scope. It is wise to remember that we don’t get away with anything just because “time has passed.” Family, it’s either be loved into repentance through our Big Brother’s sacrifice, or get swats from our loving and attentive Father. Question: The Lord chastises those whom He loves, so how have been your chastisements?

In this book of The Revelation can be viewed first the carnage of Satan’s wrath, then finally God’s wrath. Satan’s wrath should be viewed as his wild thrashing about, knowing his time has come and he is about to get God’s promised and unavoidable justice. Then God’s wrath can be viewed from either the buzzard view [as a completely mean-hearted, undeserved punishment of mankind, on evil and innocents alike], or from the dove view [as righteous and perfect justice in every case from a perfect and patient God]. Each will form our own view, based on our knowledge of God and mankind. Question: What is your view of the Lord’s wrath being poured out on the earth, including on babies, children, helpless old folks, and ignorant others?

John was very mystical in all of his writings, which at times presents us with some difficulty understanding what he saw and heard. No wonder that the Lord chose him to write this mysterious book. However, in Chapter one verse three John tells us that these words are meant to be read, heard and heeded, meaning studied, understood and lived. Contrary to the thinking of some, the symbolism in the Revelation is meant to reveal truth, not hide it, so we need to get spiritually and biblically aligned with John. That responsibility is upon us, by the Lord’s assignment to the church and by our personal acceptance of our assignment, and so we are studying The Revelation [perhaps only the first 3 chapters in our present approach] with our assignment in mind – that being “the condition of the church.” Question: Are you challenged adequately and positively by the Lord in The Revelation?

Note that it is not “Revelations,” but “Revelation.” The entire book is one revelation, thus the singular.

When something is difficult to understand, what is to be done? Ordinarily, we turn to those who have experience and understanding of the matter first hand. John is not here, but the Holy Spirit Who hovered over John in his writings is with us in our studies. Perhaps we learn additionally from those who knew the writer and who had the Lord’s mind in their writings. In our case, those persons will be other Old Testament and New Testament saints. Their writings give us understanding about The Revelation. If we understand the writings of those writers, we can have confidence that we will also understand John. However, in some cases we will still be baffled, along with all other students of The Revelation and other parts of God’s Word. In those cases, we will not have full understanding but will not be left completely in the dark. Question: Are you being encouraged by your increased revelation of scripture and the Lord?

The Book of The Revelation is the conclusion of all previous biblical writings and revelation. It is God’s final approved printed word to mankind, but not His final word by His vocal eternal Spirit. In the first chapter, the Lord Jesus Christ reveals Himself. It is one of His many self-disclosures, calculated to set the stage for all that His disciples throughout the centuries of the church would need for life and godliness, for coming to the knowledge of Him. He had been partly revealed in the Old Testament; then in His birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension in the gospels; and then elaborate theological interpretations were provided us in the epistles. Question: Are the scriptures alive to your biblically submitted mind and further enriched regularly by the Spirit?

From another view, the gospels show Jesus’ humiliation and death, and The Revelation shows Him in His glory. His message to us here is that the results are worth the pain and the waiting, the trusting and obeying, the wondering and the confidence. Confidence in His and our ultimate victory makes us victors now, not only later. Question: Is your patience while enduring pain and difficulty still improving?

Our approach will be to understand John literally unless contrary evidence is given us. For example, stars will be understood as stars, and earthquakes will be understood as earthquakes, unless it is clearly not so. We will depend upon the Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and [of course!] Daniel. In fact, we would draw knowledge from almost all of the Old Testament books if we were to go beyond three chapters. New Testament writings and extra-biblical church writings will be very helpful. Question: Have you seen the complete unity of the Old Testament and New Testament? I still labor over parts of the Old Testament, plus some of the New Testament.

Christians are not the first to teach that the 6 days of creation were true literally but that they were also metaphors that pointed to 6,000 years of human struggle during God’s revelatory actions. The Jewish religious wise men saw that Moses established this millennial concept, with the Lord resting on the seventh day after creation. That seventh day of rest speaks to the seventh 1,000 years of earth’s history, called the millennium, near which we now stand. Question: Are you in agreement with that posture?

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament point to the seventh millennium as the “day of the Lord.” Nine of the Old Testament prophets used this term as they wrote about the events that would occur with the beginning of the seventh millennium. See Isaiah 13:6. So, the seventh day Sabbath and the seventh year Sabbath are much more than a day or year of rest and worship. They point to the seventh millennial Sabbath when the Lord and mankind will cease from their daily type of labors [Gen. 3:14-24] and enter the Sabbath Rest when all will be restored. Note that we also have that Sabbath Rest now by faith – see Heb. Chapters 3 and 4. Also see Ps. 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8. Question: Do you grasp that and does it grasp you?

We are about to get a picture of the Lord’s feelings about and dealings with His church. He will give compliments and criticisms, assurances of the eternal security of believers and of the insecurity of make-believers, with eternally helpful directions to both. The churches were, like now, faced with problems, even insurmountable ones. They persisted in faith, saw impossibilities become only difficulties, then difficulties become victories. Question: Have you gone through the same process of facing insurmountable problems, which became only difficult problems, then no problems at all?

Let these words written on paper and passed on to us be applied to our souls and then to others – they are precious and blood bought. They are full of hope and have the capacity to stir us to our individually assigned Holy Spirit actions. They can stop us from playing church, stop our trying to be relevant to the world and in the world’s ways, and stop our being like the world. Instead, when we begin to live the gospels by the Spirit, the world will again be impressed with the church and our Head, King Jesus.

The church has been in a time of not applying God’s word to our lives, which has resulted in our often-aimless drifts, not being hungry for His word, so not studying His word. We have been using the Bible in unprofitable, religious ways, like did the Pharisees and Sadducees. This Book of the Revelation is one of the Lord’s grand efforts to bring life and health to His church. Let’s open our hearts and minds to the Lord, like did those Galileans of Jesus’ day. Perhaps the Lord will again send His word and heal our land.

This teaching on the first three chapters of The Revelation, part of my teaching on “The Condition of the Church,” will be continued in this and other editions of THOUGHTS. It is being presented weekly on Zoom at 11:30 AM, to which if you ask you will receive. It is also recorded, for your after-listening. Enjoy.

1. This is a Thought taken from the fresh and occasional writings of A. H. in Scotland. He sends out an e-mail about twice a week that is worth reading. I have published some of his offerings here in THOUGHTS but identified him only by his initials. He is Dr. Alan Hulme, a retired medical doctor. For your edification and good pleasure, and at no cost, help yourself to some life-giving writing by a budding author, at a56hulme@googlemail.com. The following is his latest offering as of my writing this Thought:

“I am not the “happiest” of people. I would count myself as a realist rather than an optimist. I wait for absolute confirmation of something before I count it as completed. I have experienced too many disappointments from others to expect them to fulfil their word. Some if not most are very free with their promises and find it easy to break them if it is inconvenient or just does not suit them. There are others who I know will fulfil their word even when it is costly.

“I would prefer people not to promise rather than fail to fulfil. I tend not to make promises. I find them unnecessary. If I say something, I am virtually certain I will deliver. As far as I am concerned it is complete. My yes is yes and my no is no. When my boys wanted something when they were young, they knew this. They would try to get me to say that something would happen. Knowing that if I said it, it was going to happen. Equally if I said no it would not. I have tried to live my life that way in all my dealings with everybody. There have been occasions on which I have failed, but they have been few and far between. I would feel aggrieved if somebody doubted my word or accused me of being unreliable.

“How much more can we rely upon God’s promises. If we trawl through the scriptures there is hardly a chapter in which we cannot find promises of God. He does not make them lightly just to cheer us up or give us temporary encouragement. His promises are set in time and eternity. He is not slow or reluctant to fulfil them. It is almost blasphemous to suggest otherwise. He is all truth and His Word will not be broken.

“Christianity is often rather flippantly described as “pie in the sky when you die” implying that there is nothing to commend it on this earth. So much of the fun (sinful) stuff has to be forsaken if you want to get to heaven that it is not worth it. The “vague suggestion” that eternal life awaits is considered laughable. If this were the case then, as Paul writes, “we are of all people most to be pitied”.

“Our eternal life in God starts the instant we believe in(to) Jesus. His promises apply to us and they are secure. We don’t need an optimistic outlook to make them seem more real. We don’t need to look on the bright side to make us feel happy. God has said it and it will happen.

“The result is overwhelming Joy, a fruit of the Spirit, meaning it takes time to develop. Joy is referred to hundreds of times in the Bible as is rejoice-ing. This is no mere happiness as at a pleasant event. Joy is eternal satisfaction, being in communion with the Living God.

“As my old pastor once said, “God is not the least concerned about your happiness. He wants your total destruction.” Our old life is to die completely, to be replaced with the transforming Life of Christ. That is Joy.”

1. When the Lord gives understanding, or a revelation, or a word, He often does not give much information, but gives more as time passes, usually as we follow Him in that which He has already said. It is step by step, line on line, precept on precept. He spells it out to us bit by bit.

In Genesis 15 the Lord opened a conversation with Abraham, giving Himself openly to Abraham by saying, “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.” The Lord held nothing back; that was a, “Come and dine, ask and you shall receive” offer.

Abraham had a long-standing problem. He had no natural heir, no son, in which case when he died his chief steward, Eliezer, would inherit the clan – that was the default standard. Eliezer was a very faithful and capable person, but Abraham wanted a son from his own loins. You know the story, that he and wife Sarah had no offspring and it appeared that they never would. So, the Lord’s wide-open offering of Himself was all it took for Abraham to present what he considered his most pressing need, a son. And he did.

Abraham’s need and desire were not surprising to the Lord, who had creation carefully aligned to include His plans for Abraham. He told Abraham that, and covenanted with Abraham on a majestic scale, far beyond anything Abraham had imagined. Unlike us [joke], Abraham began an effort to fulfill the Lord’s promises, which led to at least one big tangential problem, a son through Sarah’s maid, Hagar. That method did not perfectly fulfill God’s word, so the Lord set aside that son for other purposes, and gave Abraham a son through Sarah – the full and perfect fulfillment of Abraham’s desire and God’s plan.

So, the common process was Step 1: Abraham recognized his desire and need. Step 2: He presented it to the present, loving, capable, active Lord. Step 3: The Lord took responsibility and assured Abraham of His intent and ability. Step 4: Abraham tried to step into the Lord’s big shoes, and messed things up humanly speaking. Step 5: The Lord cannot be messed up, so He moved ahead with His own plan on His own schedule, doing a double miracle by giving Abraham [age 100] a child through Sarah [age 90] when both were beyond their child-causing or child-bearing years.

The Lord will apply that lesson to you as you listen to Him. When you hear Him apply it to your life-situation, He will account it to you for righteousness – Gen. 15:6. It may also accomplish solutions to your problems, but His accounting of it to you for righteousness is pure gold, in God’s bank, in your name.

1. It is good to have understanding of God and His ways and His word, to hear it preached and to understand it, to be changed by that which we hear, and to have better lives as a result – is that not so? According to Isaiah [6:9-10] and Jesus [Matthew 13:10-17; John 12:40-41] and Paul [Acts 28:26-28] that is not a good beginning if based on information alone. It leaves much to be desired. What is lacking? It lacks transformation, a change of life from the heart, and Jesus would have nothing to do with working on head knowledge alone.

Fantastic! But He came to put the axe to the root of the tree, not to trim its/our behavior and appearance. This comes as a revelation of the same impact as shaking off the dust from our feet when our presentation of the gospel is not received, or that Jesus came to cause division among families [parents from children, children from parents, etc.], or “let the dead bury the dear, you come follow me.” The Lord is not after conversion of behavior, but conversion of hearts. He came to make us His disciples, not clones or christoids.

1. Our brother Job was a mighty good man. According to the Lord, Job “was perfect and upright,” which can be understood several ways, as it can be also in Genesis 16:1 [“I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.”] when the Lord was talking with Abraham. It does not mean sinless perfection, but sincere [free from fakery, pretense or deceit] and upright [honest]. That means, “Don’t fake it with Me. Be honest. We will get along well that way, despite your many faults and sins.” Play straight with the Lord.

I think that many of my delays of hearing back from the Lord, or His delay of my requested actions, have been times for my getting my head on straight in my understandings and in my prayers. It means honesty, and as our brother R. C. might say, honesty about ourselves can be an evasive matter. Until we get honest, we can be firing blanks.

1. I have begun teaching the first three chapters of the book of the Revelation in a weekly Zoom meeting [simply ask and you will be welcomed to the group], as a continuation of my teachings on the condition of the church, intending to spend considerable time on chapters two and three – the letters from Jesus to those seven churches, to every church, and to every believer. This Thought, chapter one, is a definite preface to those two chapters, and to the entire book of the Revelation. If the book of the Revelation is not for you [it is addressed to Jesus’ bondservants], simply move on to Thought number 8.

Now starts the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the designer, creator and sustainer of all creation, who came into His creation [even to those who knew Him best] to redeem it from its 4,000 years of increasingly failing disorder to restore it to its former order as a functional part of Himself. That refers to the humans whom He had created in His image, plus the animals, plants, atmosphere, and the earth itself. Into the chaos, including into those to whom He had more intimately shown Himself, by this time He had placed His own Spirit, making them of Himself, eternally. That was a commitment to make them every bit like Himself. Thus, this Book is indeed a revelation. He first shows Himself to be more like His eternal, pre-human self than He had appeared to be in the gospels.

1:1 – Here begins the unveiling of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, Israel’s Messiah, and the Savior of the world. The truth about the Messiah had been greatly concealed in the Old Testament, partly revealed in the Gospels, again partly revealed in the Epistles, but now greatly revealed in the Book of the Revelation. God gave permission for the unveiling to Jesus, Jesus gave the responsibility to an angel, the angel gave the Revelation to John, who passed it along to other believers, who passed it to us. Question: What does this revelatory gift do to you as you read it?

This multi-stage passing on of the Revelation reveals the continued limitation of Jesus’ knowledge due to His having accepted the role of Earth’s Messiah. Recall that He had been greatly restricted from knowing everything of God or mankind while He walked the earth those 33 years. He had been restricted during His earth life, and still is, and may always be, unless it is God’s plan to restore Him eventually to a full, spiritual-only, Sonship being, which would indicate that we too would follow Him fully into the Godhead, without limitations associated with our present humanity. That is a great and wonderful thing, and must be entirely of God’s doing, not of ourselves, lest we should boast. Question: With what part in your having been brought into God do you credit yourself? As for me, I was road kill and headed for hell when the Lord rescued me.

The bond-servants eventually receiving the message are the saints of all ages – the pre-church, the church, and the post-church.

The church is composed of those especially-chosen believers in Jesus Christ from the day of Pentecost until the coming day of the rapture. It is noteworthy that the word “church” is not used after chapter 3:22 until chapter 22:16, the 19 chapter-time in world history during which the Lord openly deals with His creation. That absence of the church in The Revelation is one of the indicators that the church is not on earth during the time and events of the seven year tribulation from chapter 4:1 through chapter 22:15. See 2:25; 3:10-11; and 4:1 for support of that indication.

Where is the church during the tribulation? She is where John was as he watched these events – in the heavenlies looking down on the earth. We will be there, seeing everything John first saw. And, he will be there again, still as a member of the church, getting his second view, the accomplishment of this revelation.

Angel means messenger. Bond-servant speaks of, 1) there being a capable, willing owner who is willing to permanently retain a servant as family member, and 2) a content, willing servant who chooses to remain permanently with his master, as family. Question: What happens when a bond-servant becomes a disobedient mal-content?

The words “.. must shortly take place; ..” has encouraged the church’s faithful expectancy over the past 2,000 years, as opposed to the attitude that “ho-hum, nothing will ever change. Things remain the same as always. There is no rapture or return of the Lord.” It may be that John was telling the church to always expect Jesus’ return at any time, but it is also possible that he may have been writing that to a future generation – the generation living at the beginning of the seventh millennium [that’s us, folks!].

The John mentioned here, and in 1:4, 9; 21:2; and 22:8 has always been considered to be John the Apostle, Jesus’ youngest disciple, who at the beginning of his three years with Jesus was probably a middle or late teenager.

1:2 – John bore witness to all that he heard and saw. He and the Holy Spirit assure us that this is all of it. We should get the most possible out of it.

1:3 – Reads, hears and heeds are all in the present continual tense. “Reads” indicates reading and re-reading with open spiritual ears, “hears” indicates acknowledging their truth and accuracy, and “heeds” indicates living according to what we read. All of Scripture is meant to be lived continuously. Clearly, The Revelation was given for our understanding. And, we are told that it is a prophecy, meaning an accurate and timely word from God, to us, and thus it is essential. Question: Has scripture lost some of its attraction to you, or have you lost some of your attraction to scripture?

This blessing of the Revelation is a gift from God. The Holy Spirit used the word “blessing” 7 times in this book; possibly because the Lord knew we would neglect it if we did not know we would get something personally valuable out of it. Question: Do you think the Lord would build into His word such an allowance for our weakness that He would have to tell us it would be a blessing, to get us to read it? [Answer: Yes; He does that throughout scripture, and daily.]

“.. (T)he time is near” tells us that it is time to understand and live by this prophecy-gift. 625 years previously, Daniel had been told to seal certain of his writings until the time of the end. Now, John was told to open it up to every bond-servant. Questions: Do you think that hunger for understanding and living this book are a mark in the lives of the Lord’s bond-servants? Have you seen that hunger in the church? How do we identify bond-servants as such? How about, “attentiveness to the Master’s words?” Is “disciple” an acceptable synonym for bond-servant?

1:4 – John addressed this book to those 7 churches, although parts seem more pertinent to certain of those churches than to others. See chapters 2 and 3. Grace gives us standing before God. Peace is for now and in the face of events yet to be described and experienced. Who is, who was, and who is to come – present, past and future, the timeless, always present God. John saw 7 spirits before God’s throne and simply tells us so. He provided no further comments or descriptions about them at this time.

Question: Why did the Lord give these 7 messages to 7 Gentile congregations? The Revelation is obviously Jewish, although more obviously so beginning in chapter 5, and it primarily concerns the Jewish people in the Tribulation the further we read. Answer: Gentile Christianity was to become the guardian of the Bible [the Gospels, the Epistles, and of this Revelation] while the Jews languished in unbelief. Their rejection of Messiah Jesus, now for 2,000 years, necessitated Gentile guardianship until the rapture takes us away; then their God will again deal directly with the Jews and through them to the world.

In God’s time, the veil will be lifted from their eyes and their minds will be softened so that they will recognize Jesus. That will be after our departure when, as depicted in chapter 4, the Lord will apply Himself to revealing Himself to the Jews. That’s the picture of this revelation, which was hidden from the Jews in the Old Testament and in the church days of the New Testament. No longer will the Jews have a significant Christian presence to resist, or to cause their jealousy [during the tribulation, Jews and Gentiles will be becoming believers, apparently with Jewish evangelists leading the way].

The Jews’ spiritual envy and stubbornness has led them to resist the gospel despite indisputable evidences. But during the church’s coming absence, the tribulation period will be almost all theirs, including the evangelization of one another by their 144,000 “first responders.” Question: Have you had a taste of being made jealous for your sake? How did things go?

1:5-6 – In these 2 verses John preaches a very brief sermon which covers the life and ministry of Jesus, plus the benefits to all believers. Jesus had been a faithful witness to God on earth and had been the first to be raised from the dead [since there was a first, that means that there must be more to follow] [and, although others (like Lazarus) had been raised from the dead, they eventually died again and their bodies decayed in their graves].

Jesus is ruler of the kings of the earth [ask this of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, if you have any doubt], and has released us from all our sins. [Really? Does that bit of the good news mean that we have been released from having to commit sin, and released from the penalty of our committed sins? At another time we will talk about sins, sin, released, and what the word “all” means. It is written that our sins have been forgiven, and that when we next see Him it will not be in regards to sin – John 3:18; Heb. 9:28; 1 John 2:12.] Question: What means, “Not in regards to sin?”

Peter wrote that we are a chosen race [cpr. how good it is to be American, which is also without regards to race], a royal priesthood [we have direct access to God and He is open and available to us 24/7], a holy nation [a gathered, identifiable people with a King, a Sovereign, a Supreme Leader], a people for God’s own possession [chosen by Him alone, and only for Him] – so that we could, should, and would proclaim [by word, allegiance, action and character] the excellencies of God – 1 Peter 2:9. In summation: That we may be to His glory.

1:7 – At the Lord’s second coming, He will be seen by the entire remaining world. At the rapture, seven years prior to His second coming, there is no indication that the Lord will be seen by the entire world. He will come in the sky and take the believers but will not set foot on the earth. Therefore, the rapture will not be His second coming upon the earth but will be a coming almost to the earth. That which John described here is His second coming, when those tribes who had never believed in Jesus will see Him, will recognize their mistake, and will mourn their loss. See Zech. 12:10; Matt. 24:30. John puts his personal stamp of confidence on the verse by saying “Even so. Amen.”

1:8 – The Eternal, the Always Now, the I Am, the Almighty. The alpha and the omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. When Jesus referred to Himself as the Lord God who is and who was and who is to come, He intended for us to understand that He is represented also by all the letters between alpha and omega – the entire alphabet, the entirety of His creation, but that He began creation by being its Creator, and will end it by taking all into Himself, from whence all originally came. Question: Have you noticed that He has already started the process of bringing us into Him? What an honor!

1:9 – Questions: Are we really John’s brother and fellow-partaker [companion] in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance [steadfastness] in Jesus? Our brotherhood is a gift of God, but we must earn companionship through tribulation and perseverance. See Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 2:12; 3:12. If we have not been earning His companionship, why not? If we have been earning it, how did it come about for you? That is real testimony! Discuss your tribulations and perseverance, and with whom involved.

John came to be on Patmos because Rome exiled him there due to his bold and constant witness to Jesus, and the Lord placed him there because He wanted more of that which Rome did not [that being John’s bold and constant witness], and John went there faithfully because he was determined to continue being a bold and constant witness. That is a great example of being a companion in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus.

None of us have the same opportunities as others, to be testimonies to Jesus, because the Lord customizes our lives to us. Questions: Do you walk in the knowledge of you and your life being skillfully customized by the Lord? Or, do you consider yourself like a ship adrift at sea, and things simply happen and have to be dealt with as they happen? Do you consider that the Lord is customizing your life only as long as things feel good and please you? Is that the testimony of any of scripture’s examples?

The Lord works all things according to His well-thought-out purpose for each one of us. That’s Ephesians 1:11. His purpose and actions are bringing all things into Christ, where there is order and perfection. That assures us that we have purpose, that there are no accidents, and that everything has God’s reason behind it – some of which are obvious, and some are not obvious to our limited minds and year of life at this time. So, we are not accidents and are not mistakes, and we are not victims of circumstances – although we don’t easily see that at this present time because we have 20/100 spiritual vision [meaning legally blind]. That is from the heavenly view. Question: Do you see it? Is the Lord the Lord of you, and of all that can ever touch you?

Everything is completed in the Lord’s mind before He brings it into created being. He does not have to make things up as time passes and “as events tumble into reality,” so to speak. All has been first completed in His own mind and He uses everything, whether we classify it as good or bad. He turns their effect to good, which we see when we trust Him and yield ourselves to Him. John lived out that quality of trust and yieldedness on the Island of Patmos, and believers have since benefitted from his faithfulness. Of course, John had the testimony of Job, of Joseph in Egypt, and of Jesus. Who are your faith heroes?

The writings of the disciples’ disciples state that Emperor Domitian exiled John to Patmos, a rocky island 6 X 10 miles in size. Domitian died within a year and John was allowed to return [Ah-ha, with his freshly received revelation after a year aside writing with the Lord. What a divine plan!]. Questions: Was that an accident, or something special that the Lord does with only special persons? Are you a special person? To you, what is a special person? To me and to the Lord a special person is every person.

Have you noticed that the best things cost more? Compare: 1) Moses in his personal wilderness for 40 years, then another 40 years in the wilderness leading an obstinate nation and writing 5 books of the Bible. 2) David writing many Psalms [songs of praise, yet!] while running for his life for years. 3) Isaiah’s soul pain for years, staying on course, faithfully speaking and recording God’s word, then being martyred. 4) Ezekiel’s equally remarkable ministry while in exile. 5) Jeremiah’s trials and persecution at the hands of his own people, while keeping a clear spiritual mind. 6) Paul’s anointing in word and deed as he suffered persecutions. 7) Peter, quickly writing 2 letters immediately prior to his execution. Question: Have the Lord’s strongest purposes for you usually been perfected during your toughest times? You are probably like me – it’s hard to appreciate the tough times during the tough times, and I’m glad when they end. But the ripe fruit remains when earned through tribulation and patience, and is enjoyed forever.

Questions: Is it possible to have in-depth godliness without in-depth persecution? Is there any correlation between the severity of our trials, the righteousness of our souls, and spiritual power of our ministries? How much do we control our comfort and trial levels? Is there value in self-imposed trials [foreign missionary field, genuinely sacrificial living, preferring my brother above myself, turning my other cheek, fastings, etc.]? How could the Lord get you out of your present comfort zone, significantly?

Jesus told us to expect persecution, excommunication and tribulation. In fact, He told us to be glad and leap for joy when those things happen. He said that in the world we would have those things. Yet, here in America, we are taught to expect blessings, prosperity and good treatment, and our American political expression of the kingdom of this world presumes to “guarantee” them to us. Question: Have you seen and understood it is the Lord who is mixing the difficulties and pleasantries in your life?

The way things are going, the American church is in for times of great disappointment. When that happens, as already happens from time to time in our lives individually, we are set up for disappointment in people, in government and eventually in God. Why? Because we hold people, government and God responsible for what they do or do not do for us, especially if we think they owe us better. Question: Have you noticed the trap of expectations, of over-trusting or over-requiring things of others? If you have, you have a healthy understanding of what is in the hearts of men, and have been set free to love them, not expecting the same in return. You can be wealthy one day and bankrupt the next, have friends one day and they become enemies the next, and yet you can praise the Lord in both situations – like Job, and like Jesus. The Lord knows what and when those things are beneficial. As we accept His customizing of our souls by using our life events, that is contentment and progress.

So, on the contrary, the Lord told us to expect those difficulties. Knowing and living that truth, the simple gospel, prevents unrealistic and unbiblical things from becoming our common and required expectations. Unbiblical expectations water the seeds of apostasy that have been spread abroad in our land, but biblical truth prevents them from taking root in our hearts. Questions: If you have been accustomed to living according to expectations, you may have to ponder on this a bit, but – What are your unreal, unbiblical expectations? Are you ready for the Lord to remove them? Can you watch as He shows them to you, then offer them to Him? If so, you have identified yourself as Jesus’ disciple.

1:10 – This was not a dream or a vision, but an angelic visit while John was immersed in prayer. The Lord had shared His burdens often with Ezekiel while Ezekiel was in prayer, and Peter described himself as being in a trance when the Lord gave him a vision and spoke to him – Acts 10:10-11. Paul was praying and fell into a trance in which the Lord spoke to him – Acts 22:17-18. What that says to me is that when we possess our souls, keep our peace, and seek deep fellowship with the Lord, we are a fertile field in which the Lord can and will communicate with us. It is our soul that needs quietening, no matter our environment. My personal testimony confirms that to me, also. Questions: Have you noticed that the Lord will design your situation to better get your attention? Have you been able to sense when the Lord is setting the stage for Him to work in your life – like seeing rain clouds coming to a parched land?

The Lord’s day, or the day of the Lord, is not a day of the week, such as Sunday. It is a phrase begun in the Old Testament referring to a particular time on earth when the Lord will finally “have His day in court.” It deals with His judgment being poured upon the earth and the showing forth of His sovereign rule over all of creation. Question: Is every day a good day for being the Lord’s day in your life, when His mind is revealed and accepted as ruling over you? It is not a matter of which day of the week, but a matter of the condition of your soul.

1:11 – Before the Lord’s angel takes over in Chapter 4 for the remainder of the unveiling, the Lord Jesus presents Himself to John for the purpose of being and speaking 2,000 years of coming history to those 7 churches, to 7 progressive growth-phases of the church [corporate and personally] over these 2,000 years, and to any one saint who will listen to Him at any time and place. For more on this progression, see the introductory NOTE to chapters 2 and 3, which eventually follow in THOUGHTS. Questions: When did the Lord know what would happen, even in detail, in your life? Was it after it happened, or in pre-eternity long before He formed you in your mother’s womb? Did He only know what would happen, or did He design your life and keep His hand on it continually? What about those times when evil worked against you and sin worked in you – where was God then? Answer: He was ready to turn evil to good through faith, or to let evil bring you to your knees before Him, receiving mercy, or to let evil do its work so you would have no excuse on your judgment day.

1:12 – There were 7 individual lamp stands, perhaps meaning one menorah of 7 lamps. Each lamp stand was one of the 7 churches – v. 20. Churches can be beautiful and symbolic, but good for nothing other than relics of history [like some of those 7 churches] -- unless they have oil and the oil is burning. That is Jesus’ point in these verses. Simply put, church groups have no light of their own. They must have the oil of the Holy Spirit – Matt. 25:1-13.

You will recall that Jesus at age 30 also had to have the oil of the Holy Spirit. Without that anointing, He and we do remain sons of God, but are limited to human light and power. Those 7 churches needed to hear that. A lot of us need to hear that, including we who are members of churches that have traditionally been alive by the Spirit and have our theology correctly designed. If the oil is there, God will see to its burning. And if our oil is burning, let’s not hide it, but lift it high. Think: How brightly does my Holy Spirit light shine, compared to those biblical saints? Holy Spirit light and power are not the same as human zeal.

But those lamp stands did not represent individuals. Instead, they represent local congregations, perhaps meaning all believers in a broad area. What a powerful light would be an area where all believers were united in the love of Christ [despite having many differences], and it showed as they openly loved one another and functioned as one unit. After all, differences are necessary in order to have a whole body – right? Then the church can offer to itself and to its ambient society the counsel of the Lord of heaven and earth.

When we see that wonderful vision, we will also see that all things are working together for His purpose, no matter how far from His purpose things seem to get. If not before, when we all stand before the Lord on that day, we will finally see that His purposes have been fulfilled, and were being fulfilled all along. We will look back on history and see that the Lord brought something good out of all evil that rose up to challenge Him. The short spans of human lives did not reveal it, but evil was not a hindrance to the Lord. Evil was but another tool for His glory and for steadfast believers’ eventual glory. When we see how, with patience, He brought good out of evil, and see the results of all of our trials and persecutions, we will fall on our faces and praise Him.

Those 7 lights in those 7 areas were a very small part of the earth’s surface. They were brightening manifestations of the kingdom of God in the midst of the dark kingdom of this wide world. Obviously, the magnitude of the opposition would have been too much for those few folks, as it also had appeared to be when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The whole world was controlled by Satan, although he had limited control, not total control.

Satan was the first radical rebel and he rebelled against THEE ESTABLISHMENT. He rebelled so effectively that he won his own kingdom. He must have gloated over his success, and over the many successes that followed, and over his successes that have followed in our own lives, particularly since he is still granted plaintive attorney rights in God’s court in heaven where he presents his case against the saints on earth. That includes us. So, Jesus was the light of the world, then others became the lights of the world, and those seven churches became lights of the world, and now here we are – lights of the world. What blessings! What challenges! What opportunities!

Have you noticed the difference between the Lord’s court in heaven and the council of the Lord in heaven? The devil has God’s permission to attend the court in heaven and to speak and to take adverse action [albeit limited action], but he has no part in the council of the Lord which dispenses only God’s wisdom. A court hears from all sides and considers sin and disunity, righteousness and harmony, but a council is composed only of united, holy minds.

If you have a heart’s desire for God’s unity, be encouraged. His unity is brewing among us, and it may not delay until the millennium [at which time God’s will and unity and order and power will flow abundantly until it covers the earth]. At this time, watch for opportunities to be our Father’s answer to Jesus’ prayer for unity, as in John 17.

Gold speaks allegorically of the purity of God’s nature, and of the results of His best works on yielded mankind, thus it represents the purist and most excellent results of His activity in His church. [Silver speaks of the best purity possible when the church tries to please God through our own efforts (a common semi-waste in the church). Bronze speaks of the best purity possible when mankind tries to elevate ourselves by our own efforts according to our own vision for good living. Iron speaks of the efforts of mankind trying to organize and govern ourself, which is always by force of our flesh.] All of those efforts and their results are abundant in the church.

1:13 – There stands Jesus, among the lamp stands, dressed royally. This is His time to be seen in His ascended splendor, although He is still limited compared to His previous Godhead-ness because of His now being tied to and being part of humanity. But don’t grieve; the story is not over. Although He has not returned, and perhaps will never return, to his pure pre-incarnate condition as the Son of God, He will always be the second person of the Trinity, Jesus of Nazareth, the church’s Redeemer, the victorious Son of God, and more than that! He will be the first born among billions of other glorified sons of the Father. We will be with Him and will be welcomed home in glory.

1:14 – White hair represents purity and wisdom. His eyes aflame indicate piercing judgment. Is that our image of Jesus -- with, among, and in us – pure, wise, rightly knowing all? It is helpful to get alone with the Lord and let Him enrich that picture to us -- His knowing and seeing all about us, His being absolutely pure, and that yet ahead of us He will be our judge? When I spend time doing that, I become utterly helplessness and speechless, followed eventually by quiet and deep praise.

1:15 – Feet of fiery bronze indicate divine judgment, such as for “.. stamping out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored, as the Truth goes marching on!” Waters in scripture speak of people; many waters indicate a loud voice like that of many peoples, tribes and languages. The Lord speaks every language and dialect that is, was, and will be. Questions: How do you describe the sound of the Lord’s voice as He speaks to you? In the beginning, how did you know it was the Lord who spoke to you?

By the way, when we say that the Lord speaks every language that has ever been, now is, and will be – that includes the special language He gave you, the one often spoken of as “speaking in an unknown tongue,” as described in 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14 and elsewhere. To Him, that faith language is simply another language, but it comes to Him from a believer who is speaking warmly, specially and extra-faithfully. Only He can understand it, plus those who have His gift of interpretation of those unknown languages – although if it is also a known modern language someone who knows it in the natural can also understand and interpret it. I have seen that happen.

1:16 – A right hand indicates a strong, definite actor. The seven stars indicate the angels or human messengers of the 7 churches – v. 20. When Jesus speaks, He being “God’s Voice,” the Word of God unto all creation -- that which He says is as a sharp two-edged sword, cutting into all of creation and every nation in every direction and in all matters – 19:15; Heb. 4:12. His two-edged sword cuts saints free from sin, fear of death, and from condemnation, and by a righteous judgment condemns those who refuse the gospel.

Notice that Jesus’ right hand holds the messengers [His faithful word-speakers] and his mouth holds the sword [His lifegiving word] – exactly opposite from the natural human expectation of a hand holding a sword and a mouth holding messages to be spoken, or sending messengers. My understanding of the difference is that Jesus is saying, “Go where I send you; I will speak My word through you.” Recall the Lord sending Paul to certain places and preventing him from going to others, according to the Lord’s specific instructions – Acts 16:6, 7, 10.

The brightness of His face means terror to sinners and assurance to saints. See Paul on the road to Damascus – Acts 9:3. Recall yourself, how you evaluated your parent’s face [and voice] when you were called to stand before them for an accounting.

1:17 – What a contrast to John’s previous response to the Lord’s presence. In the Gospels John laid his head on Jesus’ bosom, but here at the appearance of His old friend, mentor, and Lord, John fell to the ground in a faint. Why the difference? Why did John not immediately recognize his holy Rabbi this encounter? Reasons: Jesus’ clothing and possibly His physical appearance were vastly different than in Galilee, and it had been 62 years since they last met. This was a sudden encounter of powerful magnitude. If not before, surely John could now identify with Abraham, Manoah [father of Samson], Ezekiel, Daniel, Gideon, Job, Isaiah, Zacharias, the 3 disciples on the Mount, and Peter – and all who have heard God speak, and had doubts of His identity. The Lord’s right hand and words ministered comfort to John.

1:18 – After introducing Himself as the beginning of all time and things and the end of all time and things, Jesus fills in that vast gap with the important thing – He was dead and now is alive forever, so forget all the rest. Hades was “the place of the unseen dead,” the intermediate state for the Old Testament ones between their earth-death and the resurrection of Jesus, as opposed to Gehenna, the eternal condition of the lost in the lake of fire. The righteous ones in Hades [aka Paradise] received Jesus’ personal testimony after He died, and were then taken [with Paradise itself] up to heaven. Now the righteous die and go “up” to Paradise, and will be there awaiting the raptured remainder of the church and other blessed occasions in heaven.

Recall how the Lord introduced Himself to Jeremiah as “the one who has the keys of death” – “(E)verywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them for I am with you to deliver you.” -- Jer. 1:7-8, 19. It is a life-saving soul-comfort to know that our earth lives and our eternal lives are safely and totally in the Lord’s hands.

Jesus has the keys of death, meaning He alone controls the end of our earth life, preserving us here until we have completed our earthly course for Him, and then forever in the hereafter. We are immortal here on earth until the Lord says, “Come up here,” and then we must be gone. [As at the Rapture of the church in Rev. 4:1.] No man can take that authority and command from Him, just as no one could have taken His life from Him until He laid it down on the cross – John 10:17-18. His having the keys of death also says that He has the only true-life quality – eternal life. He is absolutely sovereign.

Don’t forget His absolute sovereignty when ending your prayers to our holy, crucified, risen Lord who hold those keys: We often end our prayers with, “In Jesus’ name and for His sake.” That means that we are not asking for God’s attention and help for [at least mainly] our sakes, but [foremostly] for Jesus’s sake. I think that our prayers in that respect are not always honest. When we say, “I am asking for Jesus’ sake,” that needs to be real, and true. For reference, recall how Moses prayed when the Lord said, “Stand aside, Moses, so I can destroy all of these Israelites, and re-start my nation with you. Indeed, Moses then prayed that God would spare those people, but his motivation was because all the surrounding nations would think less of God, that He was unable to do what He said He would do with Israel, meaning take them from Egypt, through the wilderness, and into the Promised Land. Moses’ prayer was truly “For God’s sake,” like ours should be truly “For Jesus’ sake.” God-centered prayer and life are vastly different from us-centered prayer and life, and produce different results.

1:19 – John is now restored. The things which he has seen include all of this chapter one, especially concerning the glorified Jesus Christ which he has here seen. The things which are will be of the church age as seen in chapters 2 and 3. The things which shall take place after this are the things to happen after the church departs earth as recorded in chapter 4:1-2 and following in this book of the Revelation.

1:20 – As already mentioned, the stars are the Lord’s angels or human messengers to the churches, and the lamps are those churches. Heavenly angels or earthly ministers [more likely the latter] are lights shining in a dark world, showing forth the gospel message of the light and life of Jesus Christ. That’s us, brothers and sisters, and has only partly to do with whether or not we are ordained by a religious organization. Ordination has to do with being invested with God’s authority in any and all areas of life. Recall that in Egypt Joseph was ordained by God as chief jailer in the prison where he himself was a prisoner, and then over all of Egypt under Pharaoh. Don’t hold back on your holy ordination.

1. How are you doing between your time of prayer for help and the Lord’s response? That gap of time and trial is certainly variable, is it not? It may be short and painful, or long and almost forgotten due to the smallness of the need. But that gap is full of action. The Lord heard our request and did not forget it.

Lots of possibilities there, and we may be puzzled over which applied – “No,” “Wait,” “I will modify that situation,” etc. But the Lord knows what He will do, and often lets us know what it is. He may even let us observe the process as He works the answer to our prayer in the lives of others. But the greatest working is often within us – 2 Cor. 12:8-10. The “delays” are important. They work godliness in us, we who wait faithfully on the Lord.

Faith that is deepened while abiding in a need is precious to us and to the Lord. It withstands challenges like, “Is Jesus Lord, or not?!” “Does the Lord love me, or not?!” “Does the Lord hear me, or not?!” The time between our prayer and God’s response is His proving ground for us. That can be a tough-love place. Rest in that place. You are not there by “accident” and are not being ignored.

1. I have never heard of a doctrine of church union, but I’ll bet there has been one formulated. In short, it should say something like, “You are not your own, you are mine; you are one in the spirit, so love one another as I have loved you.” There are small groups of believers who are working on Anglo-Catholic unity, on Lutheran-Reformed unity, Congregational Christian-Evangelical-Reformed unity, and more, for which I thank God. But I think that any official efforts to unify Christians will not really unify us, even if there is some degree of doctrinal agreement. Successful efforts will come from those who have unity accomplished in their hearts.

Our efforts toward unity must come from our hearts, will be led by the Holy Spirit, and will surpass [meaning not emphasize our differences to the point of disunity] doctrinal differences. Real union with Christ Jesus overcomes our differences, which are inconsequential compared to His love for each of us and His available grace. Jesus said that He in us and we in Him meant UNION! Union allows us to function as a unit. How can we allow the world, our flesh, or the devil to contradict and destroy the reality and evidence of that gift and dedication?! Should we not rather abide in the truth, than to develop our experiential untruth and abide in that? Why is not our unity associated with and valued as is the essentiality of our salvation?

1. I have been asked the story of the Redeemer Episcopal Church in Houston, Texas many times, and have written bits about it, as have many others. The three stages of Life there may be classified as its rise, its glory days, and its decline. Today, while reading Exodus chapter 3, it occurred to me that the Redeemer rose because all of the glory was of the Lord, it had glory days as long as the Lord was our glory, and it declined when we began to think that we were contributing to the glory. In Exodus 3:3, the burning bush was not consumed because it was not contributing to the fire. That is the whole story.
2. Moses and God’s people were only a few days out of Egypt and in the wilderness when they began to find fault with their life-situation and their human leadership, Moses. They began to complain to Moses [of course, they would never think of complaining against God!] that they ate better as slaves in Egypt and that, as anyone could see [not!], they were about to die in their present situation. They were so humanly self-centered that they did not give credit to God for His pure and perfect love for them. That attitude rejected the previous, yet fresh, evidences of His love and power, which would have reminded them that He would never get them into a situation that would leave them worse off than when He took them into it. My, my; how commonly human we can be!
3. Here is a buzzard’s view of mankind’s sinfulness, of our rejection of God’s good plans for us. First, mankind rejected the life of Sabbath Rest in Eden [Gen. 2:1-3], then we rejected the gift of the weekly Sabbath Rest in the wilderness [pre-Law] [Ex. 16:29], then we rejected the Law when the Sabbath Law was given [Ex. 20:8-11; Num. 15:32-36], and now we have been rejecting the life of the Sabbath Rest for 2,000 years [choosing to continue the Old Testament weekly Sabbath instead of the full-life Rest of faith [Heb. 3 & 4]. Of course, not all have done that, and the rejection has been variable from time to time. The Thought is that from the beginning, God’s love and mercy has offered us rest [Mark 2:27], and we have blindly declined His offer. That is indeed a buzzard’s view, because many have accepted His kind offer, and those who have not are offered restorative grace.

1. This Thought takes us aside a bit into the economic-medical-political part of life, for a reason. The lockdown due to the Covid-19 virus is becoming notable for its greater effect on life and health than the virus itself has been and is. You may know that many cities and states are no longer locking down and are even further reducing the usual precautions, allowing a return to normal lifestyle, jobs, schools, and socializing.

In the U. S. we don’t have good statistics yet on those relaxed precautions, but other nations do have some results, as follows: 1) The UK government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) reveals that an additional 75,000 people could die from non-COVID causes as a result of increased lockdown orders. 2) The UN estimates that 130 million more people will starve because of economic shutdowns. 3) The lockdowns caused a bigger loss of U. S. GDP (31% at an annual rate) in Q2 than during the very worse quarter of the Great Depression in 1931-1932.

It may be said that the attempts at prevention have become worse than the disease itself. That must be considered. However, the reason for this Thought is that fear has caused and driven to excess much of our response to this pandemic. Fear forces us out of faith and reason and into unreality and herd responses [stampedes]. Many are already there and are sorely distressed, and in the well-known corner where all they are fearing is fear itself. The Lord’s little people and little flocks stay close to their shepherd and their local shepherds, feeding on kingdom manna.

1. How is your diet coming along? If you are eating from the Tree of Life, you are dieting very well. When Adam and Eve were put out of the garden of Eden, they and all of their descendants were forbidden the fruit of the Tree of Life. Then the Lord Jesus was nailed to the cross. He yielded His life and was nailed to the Tree of Life. Now, as we too embrace [are nailed to] that tree, living other than for ourselves, fruitfulness and life abound in us. What a diet!
2. Do you remember why you became a Christian? There was no other way than Jesus becoming your life. Yes, there are other ways to describe it, but without Jesus’ life in us we are yet only mortal, perhaps with some mental agreement with the Bible and Jesus’s teachings, and having applied them to our lives. But until Jesus became our lives, we were, at best, christianoid. Since Jesus became our lives, we have no longer lived, but Christ in us has lived – Acts 17:28. That was a life exchange. Do you remember it? Yes, and my life has been different ever since that evening. I did nothing to achieve it; it was an act of God. I was born [again] into Him. It was a different event than previously when I had joined a church, which required meeting its particular requirements for membership, whether or not I was born-again.
3. Question: Do we confess our sins in order to be forgiven, or because we have been forgiven? Hint: 1 John 2:12. In Jesus Christ our sins have already been forgiven for His sake. That is a done thing. Then, when we sin, we confess our sin for our sake, for personal application of our already-established forgiveness and for cleansing [removing the unrighteous soul-mess that caused us to sin]. Selah.
4. In Exodus 30 the Lord gave Moses instructions on compounding a holy ointment, a perfume, an anointing oil for anointing holy objects and people. It was to be made a certain way and of special ingredients. There were strict penalties for misusing it and for anyone making and using it for other purposes. There must be no counterfeit, and no anointing of other things or people.

That speaks to the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon God’s born-again people, which is not to be misapplied, copied or counterfeited. The punishment for such is being “cut off from his people.” That sounds like being put out of the church, does it not?

I have known some spiritual people whose spirituality and spiritual giftedness was exposed as being false, then admitted as being false. What a shame, although at times, in my own efforts to act in faith, I have felt that I have been on the margin of true spirituality and the flesh. That remains my best evaluation of those events, and I try to stay away from such. I believe that a consistent walk in the Spirit is the best way to assure oneself of the purity of your spirituality and spiritual gifts. Jumping into and out of the spirit is not good, for several reasons.

1. How would you measure your, or anyone’s, spiritual growth? [Perhaps just your growth.] Our growth in Christ is exactly that – our growth in Him. That is the measuring rod. For us to grow spiritually, there must be less of us and more of Him. It is not a matter of increasing our spiritual gifts, or our Bible knowledge, or achieving grey hair, or etc. Those things are great and helpful, but our spiritual growth is not measured by things. As John the Baptist said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” – John 3:30. In case you have not noticed, spiritual growth is painful on the flesh. The “big me” has to die over and over.

And, there are things that will interfere with our spiritual growth. Having not decided to take up our crosses daily and follow Jesus is a major interference. A non-biblical mind is another major hinderance, because it leaves us at the mercy of enticing things like religious tradition, human philosophy, the deceitfulness of our flesh, and evil spiritual powers. Having entered the gate, the narrow way is our walk, but it is like putting a barefoot kid in a candy story having tacks on the floor – happiness and carefulness. Everything is working to bring us to, “Not I, but Christ” – Gal. 2:20. That verse is so good that let’s read all of it: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” That’s good!

1. If you don’t exactly enjoy reading the Book of Leviticus, together let’s look at chapter 3. Notice in verse 1 that it is about offering a sacrifice [request, petition, covenant request] for peace to the Lord, indicating that it is “I” who has offended, and that “I” am initiating the request [but using the Lord’s criteria]. The bovine offered as sacrifice may be male or female [that covers both, meaning all of the sexes] and must be without blemish, meaning it is freewill, from our heart’s desire, and without reservation [thus, without defect].

In verse 2 the petition-maker ceremoniously imparts himself to the animal [placing his hand on the animal’s head, probably stating his purpose, and confessing] and seals his commitment by slaying the animal [cutting its throat so that it bleeds to death]. That was done at the doorway of the tent of meeting, signifying the beginning of our personal approach to permanency in the Lord God. The priest [upon whom the Lord had previously laid His hand for purpose of this ceremonial (and other) occasion] sprinkles the blood around the altar. Notice here that we personally make our sacrifice and that the priest [Jesus] applies our offering [to the altar/heart of God His Father].

In verse 3 and thereafter, instructions are given regarding the presentation of other types of animals for this peace offering between men [and women and children] and the Lord. In each case, certain locations of the animal’s fat are removed, put on the fire on the altar, and offered as a soothing aroma to the Lord. The fat is the Lord’s, being the abundant and most fragrant part of the personal covenant that was provided by and is given to the Lord, not to ourselves.

Having read with appreciation and growning in Christ, now go in peace.