THOUGHTS OF FEBRUARY, 2017

Second monthly notice [thank you to those who have already responded]: Some report that they have not been receiving these THOUGHTS, while at the same time I have not received notice of their non-deliverability. One cause of this problem is that THOUGHTS may have been going to their Junk Mail, or whatever their computer may call it. Since I can’t ask those to notify me who are not receiving their copies, the best thing I can do is ask you who do receive them [and want to continue receiving them] to notify me that you have received and want to continue. I will ask that question for three months, as I have noticed that some of you get behind in your reading. After that I will purge my list of those from whom I have not heard. And one response is adequate. Again, thank you.

1. In regards to our making disciples, or our being discipled, here are some Thoughts.

 1) Initially, Jesus said two things to or about His disciples. First, He said “follow me,” then it is said of Him that He called them to be “with” Him. The basic ingredients to disciple-making is followship and fellowship. That requires a recognized leader who will lead, and who will open his/her life to incorporate the disciple(s) as much as God’s grace will grant. Information-giving is not adequate for discipleship. It is necessary that the disciple “know” his mentor, meaning to become intimate with so that the disciple is changed by his mentor into the likeness of his mentor. Jesus’ disciples laid aside all that would hinder that process because Jesus was already doing the same. For them it was a serious calling. My personal observation [therefore fraught with possible error] is that church leaders spend almost no time making disciples, but almost full-time doing the business of the congregation, preaching, administering, and speaking the truth into many situations. Discipling takes time and the giving of one’s whole life to another(s).

 2) Jesus, the perfect mentor, spoke the truth in love to everyone. He was “hard” on some, mainly to the wayward religious leaders and to His disciples. He even called Peter “Satan,” or it appears that He did. It appears that Peter took his chastisement that way. If the mentor is not capable and ready to be straightforward as is necessary [and to withhold information if necessary – John 16:12], everything he says to his disciple will be watered down, lacking in both love and truth.

 3) Mentors must be able to show methods and results. Disciples need evidence of both as they walk the crosswalk together, so Jesus taught them the Way and they saw the results. In due time they accepted the Truth and walked in the Way themselves.

 4) Failure is a great tool of God, and the mentor knows it. Mentors do not always try to keep disciples out of problems, but do always try to keep them on their crosswalk. Jesus told Peter he was going to deny Him three times before the rooster crowed, but that He would pray that Peter’s faith would not fail. The disciple must be free to fail, without being labeled as a failure.

 5) The mentor is to keep his hands off of the disciple’s soul. The Holy Spirit has His hands on our souls. Humans cannot change themselves, much less change others’ souls. The mentor’s job is to set up the disciple for the Holy Spirit’s hands to be successful. That’s also a word to parents as they disciple and discipline their children.

1. There are some calendar milestones regarding Israel that are going to be passed this year. It will be 500 years since the Protestant Reformation began. An importance of that is that, with the Reformation, people could again read the Bible, in which they found that the Lord still has His original plan for the people of Israel. That included His bringing them back to their homeland, which He has done. That was a major milepost.

Also, it is 100 years since the Balfour Agreement, wherein Great Britain committed to restoring Israel in its homeland. That was another major step forward in the biblical process of regathering Israel in their Promised Land.

And thirdly, it is 50 years since the city of Jerusalem was reunited under Israeli rule in the Six-Day War of 1967. On God’s calendar with Israel, every 50 years was/is a year of release, restoration, and celebration. Let’s keep our eyes on Israel. The clock is running.

1. Life is a progression, and growth in the Lord is a progression. By the Lord’s grace we first commit, then we begin to walk out our commitment. There are delays, detours, successes, and, for some, bottomless pits. But whatever the case, all things created change and move. In Philippians 3:7-8 Paul points out that he counted all things as loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, the pursuit of which actually did cause the loss of his everything else.
2. “How quickly we forget God’s great deliverances in our lives. How easily we take for granted the miracles He performed in our past” – David Wilkerson [1931-2011], American Christian Evangelist. When I was 34 years old the Lord gave me Life and baptized me with His Holy Spirit. Immediately I began to see His miraculous workings in me, through me, and around me. During one of our frequent serious conversations, I told the Lord that He did not owe me even one more miracle or answer to prayer. He had given me Life at the great expense of His life, and as far as I was concerned He did not need to do anything else for me. I had the pearl of great price. I have repeated that to Him many times, especially when I was about to go through, or ask for, something only He could help me with and I knew I had not “earned” it.

Akin to that, I asked Him to not let me be effective spiritually, beyond my growth level of righteousness/sanctification. I had already seen spiritual fakery and unrighteousness in “the ministry,” and I did not want to wander into that. My request has required lots of deep repentance before known approaching “battles,” thank the Lord.

1. There is a real difference between being physically exhausted, mentally exhausted and spiritually exhausted. 1) Physical exhaustion is simple to understand because we have had to deal with it from our youth. Individual parts of our bodies may need their own rest, such as hearts, feet, or eyes. The answer was usually to get some physical rest, although there are underlying causes such as disease or malnutrition that need due attention. Everyone is subject to physical exhaustion.

2) Mental exhaustion, or soul fatigue, is not much different from physical exhaustion because the brain is a bodily organ whose wonderful and specific functions are tied to our physical. But it has some important life of its own. Like the rest of the body, it can also be overloaded in intensity such as being strained in its imagination, devastated by its emotions, taxed in its memory process, blown-up in its intellect, bull-headed in its will, and twisted in its attitude. The individual “departments” of our mind [soul] need both physical rest and their specialized rest. There are many ways to rest them. Our Manufacturer has provided the ultimate ways, such as contentment in imagination, keeping our peace regarding our emotions, learning to Google topics for memory helps, humility on our intellectual path, and blessed failures for our willfulness and attitudes. I may have missed His favorite way for you.

3) Spiritual rest is different. The Christian’s indwelling Life-giving Spirit is at continual rest. He knows the truth, and knows the end from its beginning. He is designed to transfer full-time rest to our mind/soul through active trust in the Lord. If we draw our strength from our Spirit it will be adequate in every situation, and the supply will be endless. We can feed the Lord’s sheep with Life giving nourishment, being replenished as we give. It seems rather surprising that the Holy Spirit presses us firmly with a warning at this point – “Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it” – Heb. 4:1. Saints, that was written to believers. It sounds like it is very important to the Lord that we be living examples of His peace.

1. I was asked to share a teaching on how to be a Spirit-led person or congregation. This Thought will be an adaptation of that which I shared. Right off, I knew that I had no “how to” on the topic, but that Scripture, personal testimony, and over 50 years of observation [all agreeing] had given me something to say. The following was my outline, with some editing for your sake.
2. Beginning as basic as possible [and using a teaching process, often found in Scripture, of comparing a natural process to God’s spiritual process], for a life in the flesh we must first be born physically of the flesh, thus becoming a human baby, a child of our human parents, and ready to start our growing up process.
3. After being born physically, we must be born again – this time of the Spirit -- John 3:1-6. When this second birth occurs, we become a spiritual baby, no matter our natural age or education or social status. See John 1:12-13, where the word translated as “child” or “son” means baby or young child [teknon]. We become a new baby spiritual creature and we are ready to start our growing up process.

The success of that process can be measured in various ways, one of which is our being leadable by the Spirit. See Romans 8:14, which says that those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God. The word “sons” there means mature sons [suios]. So, a mature son is one who has gotten serious about the Lord, the Lord’s way, which has led to the development of God’s character and behavior. Being leadable, teachable, and changeable are evidences of spiritual maturity. Next, beginning with 3), let’s look at that years-long process from the time of our spiritual birth until we leave this temporary earthen body.

1. That which made us born again was the Lord’s placing of His Spirit within us when we heard and accepted the gospel. All things of us became different – Rom. 10:9-11; 1 Cor. 2:12-16.
2. We then began to have a personal awareness of the Lord’s presence, of His working in and through us, of our being transformed [fundamentally changed] vs. only reformed [behaviorally]. We had a new nature and were a new creature.
3. We began to pursue the Lord, to desire Him and His will, to love His Word, to sense His leading. Our newness began to show.
4. His love for us, and our growing love for Him, brought us to the point of committing ourselves to the Lord according to His first and greatest commandment – Love the Lord our God with all that we are and have (my paraphrase – ed.). By His grace, we saw the deal! It was very lop-sided. It was His life for our life. With willing hearts and soon-following actions we committed to laying it all down for Him, and He started each of us on our customized life in the Spirit.
5. We soon desired our new life more than anything of our old life. We began taking up our crosses daily and following Him. He led us into and out of tough places, but He was with us. He was active within us and around us. Through trusting Him, we developed spiritual insightfulness, spiritual gifts, openness and generosity. Life and Love brought us into close Family relationships.
6. We were drawn to those who were in need in their bodies, souls, and spirits. Others, in whom the Holy Spirit had begun the same work, became closer Family than many have ever had.
7. Spiritual leadership of all sorts were brought to the front in our spiritual Family. Jesus Christ came to form a worldwide body, composed of many local bodies for most of His operative purposes [Bible Studies, local congregations, prayer meetings, co-workers on our jobs, etc.].
8. Spiritual leadership requires spiritual maturity, personal righteousness, correctability, an ease of repentance, not being an abuser of self or others, and an ability to teach or preach. Note: An ability to teach or preach is not limited to their typical religious applications. Anointed teaching and preaching in and about things in the marketplace and home create life and have eternal value.
9. A persistent Thought: If you are in a tough spot, and you have been mostly faithful to the Lord and others in that tough spot, and it is getting only worse, don’t jump ship now. The long and increasingly burdensome “pregnancy” is guaranteed to get worse just before the fruit is borne. Many give up and leave [in one of the many ways we have to “leave,” even while remaining present physically] just before the long-awaited victory. God bless you in your faithfulness.
10. If you are one who actively trusts in the promises of God, be careful. It is the One who makes and sustains His promises who should have our active trust, not His promises. We have His promises in order to know what He will do as we walk faithfully with Him. Focus on Jesus, not [so much] on His promises.
11. Apostasy is defined as a total falling away from one’s belief, whether religious, political or otherwise. That sounds like a broad enough definition, but it is actually a narrow one. A more accurate and full definition is that apostasy is a falling away from an established state of being, from things firmly established, from a “basic way” – especially from a way that has “always been.” The main difference in definitions is obvious, that another person would have had to set the established state of being that has “always been.” Right?

When Jesus said He is the Way, He was stating that He Himself was the way everyone was to be, and that the way He talked and lived was the way everyone was to talk and live. He presented the truth, and the truth was that all are to be and do like He was and did. There was more to what He said, like He was the One who would enable us to be and do like He was and did, and He was the Way to eternal life and heaven.

With that information in mind, we can see how far fallen man has fallen – all the way from perfectly good to totally depraved – from the order of creation as is found in Christ Jesus and His creation in Genesis chapters 1, 2, and 3. Totally depraved, yes, but not totally unredeemable if redeemed by a redeemer of adequate identity, quality and quantity. The Creator, who is the Way, is also that Redeemer. You know the story of our redemption.

But the story did not end with Jesus’ work of 2,000 years ago nor with its continuation since that coming. He will come again as the next step in redeeming the world. It is before that second coming that we will experience THE apostasy. Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2 about the departure from The and all truth before Jesus returns. Recognize in that chapter the magnitude of the total departure to come, not only the most important departure from Jesus, His word, and the church. More on this below.

Jude wrote in verses 17 to 25 about the worldly-minded mockers and dividers during the end times. He wrote with a broadness that goes beyond things obviously religious.

Those two references point to a full breadth and depth of apostasy, not just in the church. The apostasy comes because of the weakness of the church, but is not only a problem of the church. The entire order of things will be shaken and some destroyed by anarchy, rebellion in all areas, reversal of the definitions of sin and righteousness and of right and wrong, reversal and confusion of sexual identity, self-justification on the basis of what feels good and other licentiousness, women ruling over men and children ruling over parents, lying as being smart and wise behavior, the taking of young human life in and out of the womb, euthanasia, all forms of authority and order and institutions challenged and overturned by the ungodly, the approval of homosexuality and of unrighteous heterosexuality, theft being approved and legalized on the basis of one person having more than another person (or “more than he needs”), greed being approved and legalized on the basis of one person or group having more power than the needy, lying-stealing-deceptive scams of all sorts, and on and on.

The point is that the apostasy will be a turning way from and destruction of long-standing normalcy and institutions, the foundations of which were originally laid in the Lord, even though many of the mores and foundations and institutions may have lost their spiritual life, power and testimony long before.

1. The Lord has been revealing Himself to human creation since “the beginning.” It seems like the process has already taken six thousand years, but it has been only six days [Ps. 90:4; 2 Pet. 3:8] on the Lord’s calendar, which we will all soon become accustomed to using. We have the biblical record to show us the progressive revelation of Himself to His chosen ones. That record shows that the revelation of Himself to His people, both Jew and Gentile, and Church and non-Church, is incomplete but still progressing. It will continue to progress for at least another 1,000 years.

In that majestic view, let’s consider those who have never had their personal opportunity to become believers in, or rejecters of, the Lord, during the 4 days before Jesus’ work on His cross, during His 72-hour preaching mission in hell immediately after His death, and in the 2 days since. Many others of the faithful have considered that God-only-knows situation, so we will be in good company.

Roman 11:33-36 tells us that God’s knowledge is endless, that He has the answer to every question and situation [of course]. In Proverb 25:2 we are encouraged to get with it, meaning we are to search out some of that endless knowledge. The saints have been doing that for millennia, or 6 days. Their humble searches have been fruitful because the Lord says if we will search for Him and His riches, He and they will be found. It is in the seeking of Him that we find the riches of His knowledge. Lest we unbalance this paragraph, it must be said that our seeking and finding are results of God’s grace and revelation, not simply of our efforts. That leads us to Romans 14:1 [KJV] which humble searchers into doubtful disputations will remember was not a strong point of the Pharisees.

For years I peeked at the question of the untouched lost, then went on to other and easier things like saving lives, relieving pain, calming the nervous, helping Nancy raise our 5 sons, and reaping my personal harvest through learning to repent. The untouched lost was not a pressing question, and I had definitely been assigned those more solvable problems. But I was never able to say, “It’s clear that they just go to eternal hell.” So, let’s open our biblically informed minds and look at Romans 1. Our question is, “What is the position before God of those who live and die without having been touched by the gospel, and what is their eternal condition?”

v. 18 – After reading the verse it is clear that God’s wrath is present and obvious in the lives of the ungodly who suppress [restrain, twist] the obvious truth in unrighteous ways. [I am not sure yet of the difference between unrighteous ways and righteous ways of restraining the truth, but the Lord knows. It probably has to do with intent, available information, etc.] That is a very sticky twisted ball of sins and their consequences, which also applies to us if we hold tenaciously to our personal and denomination theologies at the expense of loving others and maintaining unity despite unavoidable and almost endless “doubtful disputations.” Of course, our disputations are not doubtful.

v. 19 - 20 – God has revealed enough of Himself to and in them that they have no excuse for not knowing that He exists. Not only that, but His handiwork in all of creation makes evident His character. Notice that this knowledge [source of information about God] has not come from God revealing Himself to special ones, and not from Him communicating with chosen humans, but that the truth of His existence and His character are shown to all by His handiwork, like a painter’s paintings or parents’ parenting or a farmer’s farming. That which we do reveals the truth of us – Matt. 11:19. In God’s case, that adequate information has been [and still is] available to anyone who can see, hear, feel or taste. Humanity is without excuse if we do not believe in our invisible creator and know His nature and ways. That revelation is rudimentary compared to the revelation of Jesus Christ, but it is provided to those who do not have more.

v. 21 -- But then, although they had adequate available information about God, they did not relate to Him according to their God-provided information. They did not and do not honor Him as their Lord, but …

 v. 22 - 23 -- … became fools by making idols and images of men and animals, calling them “god” and assigning to them various attributes of the one real and living God.

 v. 24 – 32 – From here on it is downhill, from 1) God gave them over to impurity, 2) they dishonored one another’s bodies, 3) they embraced lies and denied truths, 4) they worshipped created things instead of the Creator, 5) God released them further into degrading passions, 6) they received due penalty for their error, 7) God released their minds into depravity, 8) were filled with all forms of unrighteousness, 9) had no understanding of properness in God, and 10) they approved others who did the same.

So, after studying those verses, and seeing that there were and are those who are offered the revelation of God only through nature, and seeing the outcome of those who did not honor the God who says He is adequately revealed in His creation – the question is, what of those described there who took the dishonorable course? What was their condition with God during their earth life [they deserved and received God’s wrath], and what is their eternal condition? Whatever their condition it was not and is not and will not be good.

But then, what of those who honored God, knowing about Him only according to His revelation in creation, who took the honorable course? What was their condition with God during their earth life [they did not deserve or receive God’s wrath], and what is their eternal condition? Whatever it is, it is not as bad as the other groups’ condition. How does it compare to the Christian believer’s condition?

1. Strength rejoices in the challenge. To be strong in virtue we must welcome a challenge.
2. A word, common among the prophets, continues to press into my thoughts. One site is from Jeremiah 5:31-32, which reads: “An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and my people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?” That which the Lord calls appalling and horrible is really appalling and horrible. And it was happening among His people! It still happens among us.

That “thing” was:

 a) a dishonoring of God and His words. Prophets, those responsible for speaking for Him to the people, were making up things contrary to God. They did not listen to Him, nor honor that which He had already said, beginning as found in the writings of Moses.

 b) The priests, those who were to direct life and worship in the other direction, meaning from the people to the Lord, were doing their own things. They were self-willed and self-directed. When Jesus came into that situation, He said of the priests; “They have seated themselves in Moses’ seat. Do what they say but don’t be like them” [my paraphrase – ed.] So, those priests had no authority except that which their religious culture granted them. They had no authority from above – none from God! To religious persons that is fine; they don’t even know there is a difference between the church’s authority and God’s authority.

 c) Here comes the appalling and horrible results [although not the final results, which occur later in this life and in the hereafter] – the people loved it that way! Here shows the shepherds’ failure and the sheep’s blind satisfaction. Once blind, the flock falls for anything.

 d) Notice the Lord’s warning, which comes as a question. He who knows the end from the beginning asks: “But what will you do at the end of it?” All of our decisions have consequences. Accumulated “little nothing” decisions bring major results whether good or bad. There is an “end” to everything we begin. Nothing disappears into thin air. Nothing just “goes away.”

Another prophet said, “Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price and her prophets divine for money, yet they lean on the Lord saying, “Is not the Lord in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us” – Micah 3:11. The additional point provided here by Micah is that the leaders of God’s people taught that they could trust their all-mighty God because they were God’s chosen people. They taught that their God was a “sugar daddy” who would never do anything to make them uncomfortable or injure them, such as send droughts, plagues, and savage nations to steal, kill and destroy. They did not know their Lord and they did not believe His word. To their painful enlightenment, they learned that He would do those very things because He was indeed their God. He was [and still is] that wise and loving Father who is with them and us. He has not changed His ways.

1. Thus, it is firmly established that the Lamb of God and Lion of Judah is with us. We are His workmanship. He is developing in us Christ-like character and the knowledge of our acceptance before God by the way of faith [not our way, which would have been by the way of keeping God’s rules and regulations]. His project, now that He has brought us into the Family by His death and resurrection and has given us His Spirit, is to do His work in us in this earth-life, while we are yet in our present physical bodies with our Adamic humanity, so that He can present us before Him, holy and blameless and beyond reproach [if we will learn to trust and obey Him in, by, and through faith, not by our works] – Col. 1:22-23. He can do that in us because He has made us new creatures. We are not as we were before we were born again. All of our old things have passed away; they have been replaced by new things that can never pass away because their quality and quantity are of God. They are done – 2 Cor. 5:17-18!

1. Therefore, the fact that the Lord is with us guarantees His action, not only His presence. When we need protection, we are protected. When we need trials, we get trials. When we need chastisement, we are chastised. All are blessings if we have His eternal perspective. His presence guarantees His full-time activity through whatever is necessary and proper from the heart and hand of the holy and righteous God, our Father. When we need to be forgiven and are penitent, we are forgiven. When we need to be forgiven but are not penitent, He works on us to bring us to repentance. His work may be directly on us, or it may be indirectly on us through others and situations – sickness [ours or loved ones], natural disasters [heat waves or hurricanes], or simply “accidents and incidentals,” of which there are none.
2. If you have put on your biblically-informed imagination, consider these questions. When Jesus and His disciples were in the Garden of Gethsemane [Matt. 26:36-46], why did He separate Himself from them as He went to pray in private? He took Peter, James and John a little further than the others before He separated from them, also. His instructions to them were to sit here, watch, and pray.

The best answer I have on this beautiful February day is that if they all stayed together, they would rely upon Him to do the praying, and that He truly wanted their prayers. So, He left the eight in one group and took the three more powerful (?) prayors further, then separated a bit from them, also. It may be [but unlikely] that He did not want them to hear Him utter His most naked, needful, soul’s conditions as in verses 39 and 42. It may also be that He wanted a few seconds warning before Judas and the temple guards pounced on Him, so He twice asked the disciples to “watch.” His arrest would be a time of temptation to Him and the eleven [v. 41] so a few last-second soul-gathering preparations would be helpful to all.

It is difficult to comprehend the tremendous strain and temptation on Jesus as those fast-unfolding events took place – a possible sword fight, disciples becoming murders, His ministry becoming a rebellion as well-made plans turned into chaos with the Roman garrison getting into the fight, etc.

It is a blessing to see how Jesus handled their persistent failure to be of help during His trials, from the garden onward. When He found them asleep, He simply recognized it before them, and said, “Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!” – v. 46. That reminds me of a sports principle that when a player makes a mistake he is to shake it off immediately and get going on the next play. The past is past, the future is fresh and it starts now.

1. I sometimes think of my tendency to think and live and settle down in the best of my humanity. When the Lord has already done such great things in my soul [“Amens!” allowed from those who knew me in the old days] it is tempting to just sit back, plateau spiritually, and enjoy the already-accomplished blessings of His handiwork and, so not to become too carnal in my settling on my own plateau, rejoice in the promised salvation that comes next in the heavenlies. That is laid out in 1 Peter 1:3-5. If you tend to the same, you have noticed that our settling is disturbed a bit by the real-life events of verse 6 – our various trials and temptations. The motivations of necessity are concealed blessings.
2. We need Truth and Spirit. The Truth sets our course, our Way; the Spirit gives us power for the Way. Jesus is the Truth; the Holy Spirit is the power. Jesus was the Truth from the time of His arrival on earth, which provided Him all that He needed for His personal righteousness, but He needed the power in order to do anything beyond personal righteousness. At age 30, after His water baptism by John, He received that power as the Spirit came upon Him.

The Church has received the Truth, the church being “every person born again through faith in Jesus.” Like Jesus before His age 30, the church that has Jesus has all that is necessary for the righteousness that comes through faith. Even in time of drought the church can stand on, or if necessary, cling to the Truth. The Truth is God’s gracious provision that stands forever. If not so, with each fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit the Lord would be restarting the church, not only re-vitalizing it. But with the truth in place, the coming of the Spirit gives new life to the church. You have noticed in that respect that not all who are called the church receive the new life in the recurring outpourings. Those who do not receive, continue in dryness.

1. Have you noticed that the difference between doing something that is an honor, and something that is a sacrifice, depends on who asks you to do it? Did you find it an honor when the mayor asked you to do something but when someone of low standing asked, it was a sacrifice? Check it out. Give the Lord, in either case, the honor He is due. Do all as unto the Lord – Col. 54:23. It is He who assigns responsibilities and honors, not only those awaiting us in eternity.
2. In Luke 5:1-11 Peter was amazed at the large catch of fish. He was also convicted of his sinfulness. What convicted him? At first glance it would appear that the miracle itself convicted him, in the face of his unbelief. But, think of this. In verse 5 Peter had disavowed any faith involvement in the silly project of restarting his fishing day. He did what the rabbi had instructed simply because of their traditional religious and public involvement, and made a public announcement of it. Peter “knew better” than to go back to fishing on that occasion, and knew that it would make him look downright foolish, so first he publicly denied any confidence in the rabbi’s instructions. My Thought is that his prideful self-exaltation and deliberate public separation from the rabbi’s “dumb instructions” were the reasons for his deeper conviction.
3. Humbling experiences are of God, though they are not usually appreciated as such, at least not at their onset. Our flesh has an array of defenses labeled, “For Defense Against Being Humbled.” They are like the Lord’s chastisements, which are not joyful until we endure faithfully and sometimes until we begin to enjoy their fruit. Both types of soul/me reductions usually come through others’ actions against us, and commonly are due to their sin or crudeness, despite their being the Lord’s tools in His hands. But those experiences in the wise and kind hands of our Handiworker are of great eternal value to us.

The human tool may even enjoy being used on us, and go further than a righteous tool should go on the project at that time. Our Handiworker has that all covered, to our eternal benefit. The payoff for our abiding in Him during the process is tremendous, but if the tool is unrighteous it is in trouble. In the story of God’s chosen people in the Old Testament, when they had wandered away from Him, the Lord patiently forewarned and then used heathen nations to humble His people. The process worked. Israel returned to the Lord, repented, changed their ways, and the Lord restored them. Babylon, one of those nations, did a great job of humbling and chastising Israel, but rejoiced in its “assignment.” For that, the Lord humbled and chastised Babylon. Our lesson? Be humble ourselves when the Lord uses us to humble others.

1. In Matthew 18:3 Jesus told them that they had to be changed into the likeness of little children if they wanted to enter the kingdom of heaven. I don’t have to look very far to realize that it is not necessary to become like a little child in order to be a member of the kingdom, so what is the difference between being a member of the kingdom and entering the kingdom? The kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, not a natural one [yet], but we can use the natural one as an example. I am an American citizen. If I wanted to remove myself from living as an American I could move to another nation where I would live according to those laws. I would still be an American citizen but would be living by another nation’s laws. When Jesus said we need to become like children to enter His kingdom he was not denying our citizenship, but clarifying the non-Christian “location” of our soulish behavior. We would not be living in the kingdom.
2. So, fellow overcomers, we will reign with Christ in His millennial kingdom [Rev. 3:21] and are being offered many additional rewards [Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12]. And what are His requirements for being labeled “overcomer?” Are Christians overcomers simply because we are Christians? Or, are we overcomers because of some type and degree of accomplishment on our part, as shown in each of those 7 references? Some of the church are not overcomers.

It appears that we have involvement in being labeled “overcomer” and being rewarded so highly by our King. If so, especially in regards to ruling over nations, where did/do we learn to rule? It must have been during our life on earth because He will label us overcomers, or not overcomers, after we die our earth-death and go up to Him, but before we return with Him. Where are we learning, or not learning, to rule? Yep, it’s right there in ourselves. We are learning to rule over the world within us. The course titles are, “Learning to Rule Over Our Hearts,” “Conquering Our Natural Instincts,” “Self-Denial,” and “Taking Up our Crosses.” That’s serious stuff. We are learning to rule over an invisible kingdom, although its invisibility gives evidence of its presence. We are kings-in-training. Many are unaware of the ongoing process although we are enrolled, our tuition is paid, and the clock is ticking.

 Virtus tentamine gaudet.