THOUGHTS OF APRIL, 2014

1. Here are some Thoughts on hearing God’s voice; more particularly, the value both of hearing Him for oneself versus hearing Him only through others.

Exodus chapters 19 & 20: Read those two chapters, and then consider the following questions. God’s people had been out of Egypt for 3 months [19:1], had seen God’s mighty miracles on their behalf in and while coming out of Egypt, so why were they frightened of their God and His voice? It’s not that every person was frightened. Exceptions were Moses and Aaron, and possibly others. Why would the Lord have destroyed any others of His redeemed people who would have come up the mountain with Moses? Instead of being fearful of their God, why did they not instead celebrate the reality of their God, that He was with them, that He was their personal God, and that He had [and would often have] spoken directly to them instead of only through Moses? They celebrated the golden calf god they themselves had created; so why did they not celebrate their living God who was obviously, actively and powerfully among them?

Deuteronomy 5:1-10, 22-33: Read those verses, and then consider the following questions. Here Moses, years after the above Exodus chapters, reminded them of that earlier event. I ask again, why were they afraid of God’s voice? Why did they want to hear from God through Moses, but not hear directly from God?

Amos 5:25-26: The surprising answer; no, it’s the amazing answer! They had brought their Egyptian idols with them into the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land despite God’s display of life, power and victory over those very idols in Egypt. A question: Why were God’s people afraid of Him but not afraid of their other gods? 1) Because their gods were not all-anything, which allowed the people of those gods the ultimate position of being their own gods, meaning that their gods were not all-knowing [omniscient] or all-powerful [omnipotent] or always present [omnipresent] so could be manipulated, ignored or destroyed whereas the living powerful Jehovah who had defeated those gods could not be manipulated, ignored or destroyed in any way at any time. 2) Because their human-created gods had only the power over them that the people allowed, but Jehovah demanded complete obedience and could and would act upon their disobedience. 3) Because Jehovah was a righteous God and required righteousness of those who worshipped Him. They liked gods who allowed all sorts of unrighteousness. 4) Because they wanted to call on powerful Jehovah only in their times of need, then ignore Him until their next need or desire. He was [and is] a full-time, “Me only,” “I AM” God.

Acts 7:35-43: The full and dirty truth, first concealed but then presented to us courtesy of the Holy Spirit, is that God’s people not only brought their Egyptian gods with them but worshiped them in the wilderness while they worshiped Jehovah, even as He did those daily miracles on their behalf. It’s a wonder that those believers and their descendents are still not in the desert wandering [they are, figuratively!]. These Old Testament truths were concealed in the Old Testament but were preserved and presented to us, God’s New Testament believers, for understanding, reproof, correction and for training in righteousness.

Now to us of the church:

1) Why are we weak compared to the church-age saints as described by the Old Testament prophets, by Jesus in the gospels, and in the New Testament generally? Today’s answers are, a) we have our idols, and we prefer to keep them at hand for occasional worship, b) we have been delivered from sin, are headed for heaven, and are generally satisfied with life as it is, c) the Lord and His word may fail us [at least in the special ways we want Him not to fail us (do things our way)] and, d) He is “too harsh” at times. [Both blind denials and true confessions are allowed here.]

2) Why, like New Testament people, did God’s Old Testament people prefer to hear God through Moses or some other human, instead of directly from God? Because, a) if it was spoken to them by a human they would have a “cushion” between them and Jehovah [whereas if Jehovah spoke it to them face-to-face they would have to answer Him honestly and repent, or die on the spot. Our choice is to repent and die to our sin or to not repent whereat begins the process of our dying spiritually.], b) they could walk away from a human and “consider/ponder” what had been said to them [a common action of the church on Sunday mornings, like the Athenians in Acts 17:32], c) they could get away with hidden sins when a human spoke God’s words [no one completely knows another’s mind or deeds], d) they could control or ignore the human speaker [“We hired him and we can fire him.”], e) they could claim the ability to hear God’s voice as well for themselves as the human speaker could for them [like Miriam in Num. 12:1-2], and f) etcs.

What, then, is the reason for this Thought? What is the possible outcome from something like this Thought on studying to hear God’s voice for one’s self? Does it make any difference how we hear God’s voice or determine His will for ourselves? Yes, for this reason: If we hear God’s voice only through others we reveal a lack of intimacy with the Lord. That’s what happened to almost all of God’s chosen people with Moses, even though the Lord was ready to draw each one close to Him and whisper His word/will into their souls. They backed away from Him personally and set up an impersonal religious system – an intermediate religious system designed to lead eventually to Christ’s kingdom on earth. Of course, ultimately, that was of God’s making. They rejected Life and settled for His being their somewhat-kept-at-a-distance God, so they could compromise on their will vs. His. In the New Testament we are warned to avoid the same, and that those things happened to them and were recorded for our benefit – 1 Cor. 10:11.

The insights of Ezekiel in chapter 44 are startling words for the church. He pointed to priests who were to continue in their ministrations, be ministers in God’s sanctuary, be ministers to God’s people, but who could not come near to the Lord – no intimacy with Jehovah [OT], no intimacy with Jesus [NT]. But the sons of Zadok were granted place before and ministry to the Lord Himself. They could enter His sanctuary and serve Him. What a difference! A sad ingredient to that arrangement is that those who serve people for the Lord see no difference between themselves and those who are serving the Lord.

Jesus told His disciples that He had much more to tell them but they were not ready for it yet [John 16:12]. But the good news for them was that He was preparing them for being able to hear better at a later date. Some of the church’s “later dates” are slow coming or come not at all. A hunger for intimacy with Jesus, an open mind to that which He has already said [Scripture], an ease of repentance, and a willingness to lay aside whatever needed to obey Him results in glory in the church – Eph. 3:21 (14-21).

That’s why we studied the benefits of hearing God for ourselves versus the cost of hearing Him only through others.

2. Here are some thoughts on “the mind of Christ,” that being “Jesus of Nazareth’s own mind.”

Definition: Jesus Christ’s mind was a human mind entirely and continually given over to God, voluntarily and unhurriedly. His mind was not the mind of God [God’s mind knows all things all the time], but of a human who was committed to God’s will in His life and submitted correspondingly. All Christians are offered the same. There is biblical evidence that the most perfect definition of the mind of Christ for the church is that it is the corporate mind of any unit of those who are entirely given over to God.

1 Corinthians 2:16 reads, “For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.” Any biblically-minded Christian(s) should often be able to discern God’s will according to Scripture, but we are offered a better mind than the one of being only biblically-minded. Jesus, our example, was biblically-minded but His dedication to His Father’s purpose and His trust in the workings of the Holy Spirit resulted in His knowing His Father’s will [the mind of God] – beyond being able to only apply Scripture to His life situations. For example, He would say, “You have heard it said that ….[and He would quote Scripture], but I say to you ….[and He would speak revelation (God’s mind) beyond the direct human understanding of that Scripture].” See Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-35, 38-39, 43-44. That is “the mind of Christ,” the fallible [able to fail] mind of [man/men] completely given over to God’s will and trusting in God’s grace [to direct, provide, correct, etc].

Christ came into the world to create a unit of people whose being and function would be completely in Him. Thus, wherever two or more are gathered in Him as Christ, He is with them in ways differently and more powerfully than when each stands apart individually before God and man. It is possible that, before God, husband and wife make only one, not two, in this matter.

Jesus was fully a human, being the son of a human, Mary. That made Him the son of man(kind). He had nothing going in His favor that the Church does not have. In other words, the church is offered everything that Jesus had because we, too, are sons of God and corporately Jesus’ body.

Then He said: “As I was sent, I send you,” meaning 1) He was sent by His heavenly Father, so we are sent by our heavenly Brother, and 2) as He was equipped for His earthly assignment, so we also are equipped for our earthly assignment. In order to redeem humanity by the things He did, He had to be a heavenly equipped human. In like manner, in order for the church to be God’s instrument toward the redemption of humanity we must be heavenly equipped humans.

As Son of God He laid aside everything He had had from before time began, except His identity. Keeping His identity as Son of God meant that he was untainted of the sin nature that Adam had brought upon humanity. By keeping His identity as Son of God, He did not have to be born again to become God’s son – as all other humans must. In order to redeem humanity by the things He did He had to be fully God’s Son, a condition that would also be granted to humans when they would be reborn into God’s family.

Being Son of God and son of man made Him acceptable for being our sin offering. The redemptive offering for humanity had to be both perfect and human. He was. Christians are humans who have received God’s Holy Spirit, making us sons of God in human flesh.

Jesus Christ did not have the mind of God residing in Him. God’s mind was one of the things He had to give up to become fully human. To know God’s mind He had to seek it, as we must. He knew only that part of God’s mind which was made known to Him by His Father, which depended upon His faithful, steady submission to His Father’s will.

God’s will was given Him and is given to us in several ways, such as by direct revelation [the woman at the well – John 4:17-19], by observation of events [John 5:19], by biblical knowledge [Luke 4:4, 8, 12], by and through others [Mark 5:9], etc.

3. One of the best evidences of true spirituality is the ability to make eternal sense out of natural events. Without that ability, the world and its happenings have no edifying or instructive value [meaning they then have “only temporal value”] to those who are on the road to eternity. Jesus had that ability and taught us to use it, also. See John 5:19-20.

4. What does it mean when God’s own word [the Bible] says that He hardened someone’s heart or blinded them to the truth? Answer: It means exactly that, that God hardened that person’s heart or blinded him to the truth. Examples: Exodus 7:1-3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; Matthew 11:20-26; Romans 9:1-21. The Lord is absolutely the Boss, the Creator, and all was created for His purposes, not ours. Even evil was created by and for Him. See Isaiah 45:7.

All this full-of-wonderment Scripture does not match well with some of our thinking about God. At times we like to think of Him as if He is our Heavenly Sugar Daddy. Our prayers turn into information and instruction times to catch Him up on our lives. That sort of thinking should give us a clue that we are somewhat out of line with His thinking, and that it is our thinking that is incorrect. So, He explained Himself in His Handbook to all mankind. If you don’t find explanations for the above verses, or if they are not satisfying, you may call or e-mail me.

5. I recently shared a testimony of an incident in which I displayed a lack of wisdom while teasing a neighbor. As soon as I had misspoken to my neighbor I knew I had messed-up. For two weeks I repented deeply, while looking for the Lord’s occasion to get straight with my neighbor. I did and, as expected, the Lord used my initial stupidity and subsequent repentance and confession to heal not only my and my neighbor’s estrangement but something additional in my neighbor, with whom I now enjoy a very excellent relationship.

When I shared that testimony with a brother he expressed delight that I had had that experience and had shared it with him. That blessed me. Then he said the reason for his delight was that he was glad to see that I also was human. My frailty and stupidity encouraged him. [See Thought No. 20.] I was glad that he now knew me more completely and accurately, but I was also saddened. There is a principle that says when the Lord’s sheep are a dirty grey, black sheep are more comfortable.

As a physician I know that many physical and mental illnesses can and do recur, but my confidence regarding my unwise teasing is that that particular malady in my soul will not recur. God’s grace, which was sufficient for repentance and restoration, will be sufficient for prevention.

6. Certain of us are remembered for our foibles [mistakes, sins, failures], and others are remembered for our strengths [successes, righteousness, indomitableness]. The large group between those two poles is hardly remembered after their time has passed. To me, the most memorable group is made of those who first went in one direction, then another – being outstanding in both tilts. So, we remember Judas [a leading disciple, then failure, then perdition], Peter [a leading disciple, then failure, then redemption], Winston Churchill [national failure, then international success], Alexander the Great [known-world success, then “failure” at age 32], Jesus of Nazareth [apparent failure at age 33, then success for 2,000 years and counting], and Saul of Tarsus [a success among the Jews while an enemy to Christians, then a failure to the Jews and success among Christians].

All of that is to attest to at least this one truth by John Kenneth Galbraith [1908-2006], Canadian-American economist [being a Keynesian, he was automatically a failure in economics] when he said: “If all else fails, immortality can always be assured by spectacular error.”

7. It has been said that martyrs have a greater entrance into the hereafter than do other saints. That may be true. Some such evidence is noticed in Scripture as in Acts 7:56 when, as Stephen was being stoned to death, we are shown Jesus risen from His seat at the right hand of His and our Father [Matt. 22:44; Acts 2:34-35], and standing as if to receive him. That was not only victory on Stephen’s part, but victory in the face of overwhelming odds, humanly speaking. Victory is in the quality of our competition, not in the apparent final results. – Mike Marshall [1960-present], American baseball player, paraphrased. Christian martyrs face and conquer their competition, despite the temporal results.

8. A strong bias, whether for or against something or someone, is strong evidence of a suppressed or active personal weakness in the same area.

9. Similarly, a zealous commitment to a project or person is a setup for disaster. One slip of the idolized one and the zealot is either a drop-out or a full-scale antagonist. Also, the zealot tends to use his commitment to personal advantage. Example: Judas Iscariot, a politico-religious zealot, one of Jesus’ disciples, regularly stole from their money bag and ultimately tried to force Jesus’ hand against the Romans to drive Rome out of Israel. No doubt that he had some good things going on between himself and Jesus, but there certainly was an undercurrent of self and national purpose that allowed him to think he could manipulate his miraculous Rabbi.

10. There is lots of wasted grace in the world. Jesus lived and suffered and died for the whole world so that whosoever believed in Him would not perish but receive eternal life. All sin and sins have been paid for even though many do not avail themselves of the paid-for gift. The unbeliever who is headed for hell has already had his ticket to heaven paid for. That’s a word to the unsaved.

On the other hand, the church finds it easier to sin and be forgiven than to not sin in the first place. The good news here is that we have been delivered from having to sin as much as we have been forgiven of our sinnings. Perhaps if we were more courageous (?) in our faith we would have more outstanding results while fighting temptation. Fortune favors the audacious.

11. In Matthew 16:19 the Lord told the disciples that He would give them the keys [pass on to them His keys] of the kingdom of heaven, and that whatever they then bound [restrained] on earth shall have been [already] bound [restrained] in heaven [meaning they would soon be getting aligned with the heavenly processes already underway in heaven and on earth], and whatever they then loosed [released] on earth shall have been [already] loosed [released] in heaven [again, they would be getting aligned with the heavenly processes already underway in heaven and on earth]. That is a wonderful encouragement, that they would be arranged, lined up, straightened, arrayed, put in order with the eternal stuff that God is and would already be doing in all of creation, and then be empowered to do the same with others. They and we have that opportunity because it applies to self, family, church, society, nation and world.

So, how about breaking that opportunity down into workable, graspable topics for our thinking and selective acting? Here is a short list of key challenges for those who hold or would hold the keys: 1) What does Scripture tell us about societal freedoms? [Is there any freedom without God?] 2) What does the Ruler of heaven and earth say about civil governance? 3) Is there a biblical way of thinking about economics? 4) What does covenant mean for our society? 5) What does the Lord think about lawfulness and lawlessness? 6) Can one read the Bible and apply it? 7) How much good can a business do if it is not concerned with the common good? 8) Is God interested in our hiring and firing processes? [How may covenant be established and dissolved in the marketplace?] 9) What is the business term for a businessperson who knows he/she is the servant of the user? [Hint: it’s spelled “entrepreneur.”] 10) Does the Lord care about how much we work, or if we work at all? 11) Why do ministries, businesses and civilizations die? 12) What sort of responsibility do I have for the culture in which I now find myself? 13) Are there any permanent things in my culture and how should I relate to them? [lest I find myself striving against the Lord] 14) What are the dangers of doing good, especially in my areas of function? 15) How do I notice drift vs. growth, and what to do when I see it? 16) Must marriage make the man? 17) Where can we find examples of business and church getting along in our cities? 18) Why does the paternal state’s allure endure despite its consistent failures? 19) Are the poor blessed when we make them rich? 20) Why is my conscience bothered when I exercise liberty in my religion?

I think that the answers to those sorts of questions, even partial answers, will help us bind and loose where we should be binding and loosening. Non-answers leave us to drift and allow lesser men to set our courses for us.

12. Relating loosely to closing or opening those doors, in Matt. 10:14; Mark 6:11; and Luke 9:5 and 10:11, Jesus instructs His disciples to do a public thing when cities do not receive them and their message of the kingdom of God. They are to “go out into its streets and say, ‘even the dust of your city which clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’” After that, the Lord added that it would be more tolerable in that day [of judgment, probably] for Sodom, than for that city. It seems that we are responsible for spiritual insight and judgment, for boldness and for public revelation of that coming judgment. Wow!

The one time that I recall doing something moderately close to that resulted in my being rejected and not again invited back. But that has been only 35 years ago. Opportunity, like hope, springs eternal.

In Acts 13:51, Paul, Barnabas and their companions dusted off their feet in Pisidian Antioch as they left town. Local Gentiles had received the gospel message but the town’s leaders and Jews had rejected them and their message. Those who resist the gospel need to know they have had and missed a most grand opportunity that will affect them eternally. I think that sort of obedience is now considered “not nice.” Perhaps our lack of holiness does not allow us to be thusly obedient, meaning that the Holy Spirit withholds conviction.

13. This Thought is a revisiting of Thought No. 4 of last month’s [March’s] THOUGHTS. In it, you noticed, that there was a question: “Can you think of such [deceptive] spirits and doctrines that do not have religious faces?” I’ll give you a partial reprint of the Thought, then give a response as supplied by B. & K. W.

“Misinformation is defined as accidental untruth. Disinformation is the intentional misrepresentation of the truth. Jesus said that we were to take heed that no one deceives us – Matt. 24:4. Whether accidentally or intentionally, the effect on us is the same. Paul warned us that ‘the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some would depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons’ – 1 Tim. 4:1. Can you think of such spirits and doctrines that do not have religious faces? It is probable that they will present themselves to us with pleasant demeanor and helpfulness. Deception is very deceptive.”

Now B. & K. W’s. answer: “We are reading your THOUGHTS each morning. Today we discussed No. 4 to determine spirits and doctrines that do not have religious faces. We started a list: abortion as reproductive freedom, euthanasia as mercy killing, living together without marriage as sexual liberty, sexual perversion as a right, same sex marriages …., white lies …., etc.” All these have religious implications but they are presented and held out as the morality of the majority. Thank you for bringing this up. Your question threw us into a whirlwind of dialog.”

That’s also what my Thoughts do to me. So I publish many of them in THOUGHTS as individual Thoughts for you to think about [digest], and to use in whatever way you and the Lord want your thoughts to be used. Most of you do not share your responses with me. That’s fine. You know that as long as I hear in any way from you that you want to continue receiving THOUGHTS, you will. I enjoy and benefit from feedback. A. H. in Scotland is my most prodigious responder. He comments once or more on each Thought in every edition of THOUGHTS, and faithfully has for many years. That’s not necessary, but Nancy and I delight in various forms of “A-A-A-MEN,” just as we do in challenges and corrections.

One such delight was by H. F. regarding Thought No. 10 of February’s THOUGHTS, wherein I said “.. there are no rules that are meant to be never broken.” I said that after having described how Jesus “broke” rule after rule by enlarging them, thereby getting Himself more and more into trouble with the narrow-the-rules people. Jesus would quote or paraphrase a law of God given through Moses, then say, … “but I say to you …” and make “changes” that were really revelations of God’s broader and deeper mind on that law. H. F.’s brotherly challenge was to ask if ‘there are no rules that are meant to be never broken’ applies to Jesus’ first and second commandments.” I’m still working on that, but I think I see a belly-up in my future.

So, responses or no responses are fine.

14. My; what a dilemma! In every “good deed” act of this life, meaning those voluntary acts of grace that we do for others, Jesus told us to do them as anonymously as possible, but another authority tells us to do them openly. Because Christians live in two kingdoms simultaneously [one into which we were born, the other into which we were re-born] we are continually presented with behavior choices that reveal which kingdom we have chosen to call “home” – our abiding place. The king of this world promises to reward us openly and promptly if we will do our good deeds openly. The King of the heavenly kingdom on earth promises to reward us secretly and maybe only later if we will do our good deeds secretly. So there are two kings, two kingdoms and two reward systems or paths to repayment; giving us a choice. As long as we Christians are alive in this body, like was Jesus, we are offered rewards from both kingdoms. The dilemma that our flesh complains about is that we cannot get personal credit in both places.

15. To encourage anyone who needs encouragement, such as those who have decided to call this world “home,” remember that no one in the kingdom of God is ever completely useless; you can always serve as a horrible example.

16. “I am more afraid of an army of 100 sheep led by a lion than of an army of 100 lions led by a sheep.” -- Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord [1754-1838], French diplomat, aristocrat, Roman Catholic priest and bishop. He was often criticized for changing his position on national and international issues according to the winds of time and circumstance, to which he replied that only a fool would not change his mind. He is generally considered responsible for creating a peace in Europe that lasted 100 years.

17. Some reflections from my spiritually formative years, which have been repeated variably with other groups of hungry believers in the years since 1964:

a. When Acts 2 happened to me, and to 4 other men and our families, we became fixed on following the Lord more than whether a thing looked right for our lives or was acceptable to our peers. We trusted Him, He lived among us, we believed Him for whatever He said, and He did whatever we asked.

b. It was not a new thought to us that God could do anything He wanted to do at any time, but it was news that He would do what those asked who were walking close to Him. It was a revelation of the power of faith in the lives of anyone who would abandon other walks and other gods.

c. Our self-confidence grew as we drew closer together as new-found family. That was a powerful tool of the Holy Spirit. As persecutions and other trials began, we were drawn even closer together. Those who did not respond in like manner, who did not share in our vision for a common calling, slowly withdrew.

d. We were unconditionally committed in love to live as God’s family. Thus, we found ways to get our lives and families closer together. All that we had was made available, principally to help the needy. We did not drop out of society. Instead of turning our backs on society we made changes in society by setting examples.

e. As we were drawn together in that way God’s spectacular miracles, which had given us some notoriety, began to almost cease publically. He continued working among us, making us disciples. That also prevented those from joining us who were more interested in the spectacular.

f. God’s grace in that way was making us stronger day by day. Power, not miracles, became the mark of our lives. Sacrificial servant-brotherhood was our way of life. Some of us had been used by the Lord before we came together, but now we were gathered and bound together for power.

g. Believing Christians who visited us found the life of Christ palpably real. The work was not of human making, but we were willing human servants of the living God. He did not require much of us. He required all.

h. We attained to a high level of Christ’s mind. The cost was everything we were and had [whenever He called for it]; the pay-off was everything He was and had [whenever we needed it].

18. Real and fake Christians have been at war, even against their own spiritual and natural brothers, for centuries. We are not noted for our unity, even though Jesus placed unity high on His priority list for us – John 17:22-23. We have let our differences harm our unity, instead of laboring to maintain our unity – Eph.4:1-3. Laboring for unity is often very costly, being based on our complete givenness to the Lord and the love for our neighbor as ourselves.

In the Old Testament the Lord sent His people to war, even to the complete annihilation of the enemy. At the close of the Church Age the Lord Himself will make war on earth against opposing humanity. But here we are, between those two times, often not knowing how to handle threats and persecutions. It is difficult at times to know which course to choose, war or peace, resistance or yieldedness; because Christianity is neither a warring nor an appeasing religion and believers have often chosen every course.

Often, but not always, the closer to the Lord we get, and the more united we are, the more persecution we experience. Misunderstandings, contrary beliefs and just plain evil will be allowed by some to cause trouble. Servant-brotherhood and God’s plans for us may or may not protect us, although they do reduce persecutions that are due to our own unrighteousness.

It is certainly not our overpowering numbers and abilities or earthly alliances, where they exist, that keep us safe. For a time we may be safe from obvious attacks, then we must win our World Wars, but compromise and falling away from the Lord gradually weakens us and leads to internal defeat. Having lost the battle of maintaining our servant-brotherhood and unity, strife of all sorts is our next-to-last resort. Too often, the last resort is repentance.

19. A pastor said the other day that recently he had a funeral for an unbeliever. It occurred to me that there is no such thing as a funeral for an unbeliever. Perhaps he was an unbeliever before he died, but after death he was disillusioned, which has to do with Thought No. 20.

20. To be disillusioned is a good thing. It may be painful for a spell, but to be free from illusions allows us to walk in the truth. I was thinking that we are taught various illusions, such as the one about Santa Claus, and that disillusionment of him is briefly painful or saddening, but that soon after being disillusioned we can’t help but teach the illusion to others. Of course things about Santa are sweet and homey, but then there are other illusions like parents are always right [or always wrong], our church has the truth more [or less] than that church down the street, I am the best [or worst] person in my school, our relationship was fine until she said that, etc. Illusions seem to play a big and almost necessary role in life. Certainly, we embrace illusionary processes if the payoff is adequate. Need it be that way? Can we live without illusions? What do your illusions do for you? What do they do to you?

21. What is it that people see of you that informs them that as a Christian you are a servant-brother or servant-sister? Or that you are not? Are they correctly interpreting the evidence? I remember the years when I was a passenger on “Cruise Ship Church,” and it showed. Then I became a crew member, and it showed, too. Immediately my opinion of myself changed, as did that of others who knew me.

22. The phrase “making history” is common. It applies to major things done by a person or group, and results in the event and its maker being recorded in some type of annal. Yet, “making history” is a very human way to see life and its events. “Very human” is o. k. when it does not refer to sin, but at its best it is always limited. Grasp this. History is already recorded in the heavenly books, and the Lord God is its architect. That has to do with all, from empires to individuals.

Yes, that certainly is a high view of the One who calls Himself the Almighty, and has a lot of Scripture to balance it on the side of individual freedom and free will. In my case, the better I see the Lord as the All-Mighty who loves me and has His plans for my life now and into eternity, the more freedom I experience in my soul. Thus, I consider that I am being made by history, not that history is being made by me.

23. Weird, unusual, peculiar, nonconformist, “different” are descriptive words that we don’t usually like when applied to ourselves. We like to be like our peers, not an outsider or oddball. Tall basketball players are admired, but if someone is too tall he is looked upon as some sort of freak. Being smart is good, but those who are considerably smarter than the average are egg heads – a put-down. There are those who stand out among the crowd, yet are not bothered by their obvious difference or of the consequences for being different. Jesus was that sort of man.

In the natural, Jesus would have liked to have been liked. In the natural, He would have liked to have had a successful ministry to Israel. In the natural He would have liked to have had fellowship with religious and political leaders, including the Romans. It is my guess that if He had sought an interview with any of them early-on and He had dedicated Himself to being nice to them, they would have been more receptive to His message. He could have taken His time, been patient, explained things carefully, not been confrontational – and been understood and appreciated; maybe even helped with appointments, speaking engagements, and references such as to Caesar.

Of course all of that is speculation but it is reasonable speculation. That is the way things were and are yet done. There is nothing wrong and everything right about those approaches. Except!!: Jesus was sent from heaven to reveal the totally perfect love of God to a totally imperfect humanity, which was akin to an irresistible force meeting an immovable object. His focus was entirely different than all others. His methods were entirely different than all others. He and His methods had to fail, meaning that His character and methods absolutely were not capable of succeeding among those [all of us] free-will humans in the hands of the all-mighty God who had sent Him. He and His Father knew that before He came. On the night He arrived He did not know it, but after some years of growing up it began to dawn on Him, that He was sent to fail [humanly speaking] in order to succeed [spiritually speaking]. He knew that He and His message were not going to be liked so was not surprised or taken aback when those who had been praying for Him, resisted Him. Neither did He change course. Yes, a few liked Him to variable degrees, but they, too, failed Him when He most needed them [humanly speaking].

So, going back to the top of this Thought, Jesus was a non-conformist, a miss-fit, and a lot of other even worse things in the thinking of religious and worldly minded people. He was “outside the camp” because inside the camp was sin. Outside is where we must go to be with Him. If our life and message are reasonably the same as those to whom we are sent, we can expect “success.” If it is sufficiently beyond them [perhaps this is only for leaders], it is likely that we will meet with our Brother out there, not within the camp. The Holy Spirit encourages us to join Him where He is, saying, “Hence, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.” – Hebrews 13:13. We don’t need to plan some outlandish life or message in order to be seen as “different.” Following the Lord will take care of the matter.

24. Over the past 50 years I have heard some believers speak of being mad at God when things went badly for them. At first I just brushed it off, labeling it a poor choice of words on their part. After all, how could a believer be truly mad at God? But I heard more of the same, and began to realize that they had been and some were still actually mad at the Lord, the Creator, their Savior who had died for them, the One who gave them Life! They had on a serious pout. God was not doing what they wanted, or He was “allowing” things they did not want, so they were making Him suffer by sulking. Perhaps worse, they verbalized it terribly. Even long-time believers and supposedly mature saints did it. It seemed like others quite easily understood their grief and sympathized with them and their response. It was almost like they knew a different God than the God of the Bible, the one I knew.

Somewhere around that last sentence seems to be the answer to their problem with the Lord. They don’t know Him and don’t know His ways. So how can they trust themselves into His hands and praise Him in every situation? How then can they believe that He turns every bad thing to good, making everything work for His glory and for our eternal betterment? Their God is nowhere near being that all-mighty One. That level of conception leaves “believers” in bad places time after time, because His promises are effective through faith and obedience. That explains His being “good at times and bad at other times.” It’s a confused, living death.

The answer? Draw close to Him in our times of need. As His little children let Him inform us and comfort us. He is the answer for the faithful; He has the answers for the less faithful who require a few supportive facts before believing. The “He is” [= I AM!] is a full-time answer. The “He has” [= some extra facts] may be slow acomin’, if at all.

25. Variably, churches have made beautiful changes in certain foundational things passed along by the “first church.” We have crosses covered with flowers, polished, and bejeweled [vs. it being a symbol of love and sacrifice where our Savior died]; abundantly supplied Madison Avenue types of leaders [vs. sacrificial servant-brother shepherds – Matt. 20:20-28]; a dash of water [vs. immersion]; egg hunts that point to fertility rites [vs. to Jesus’ resurrection]; Communion services where all Christians are invited [vs. an admonition to first be in love and charity with everyone – Luke 22:21-22; 1 Cor. 11:27-32]; open sin tolerated and even celebrated [vs. obeying Jesus’ careful and loving instructions for church-wide attempts of restoration of chronic sinners – Matt. 18:15-17; Rom. 1:24-32]; democratically organized [vs. biblical kingdom order – Eph. 5:22-30; 1 Tim. 2:12; Heb. 13:17]; and human power [vs. Holy Spirit power – Matt. 16:18].

I think [here comes an opinion] that all of those variances show a real difference in what the church is, compared to what is offered to us. The offering: A living, serving, powerful Body of believers with Christ actually functioning as their full-time Head. Not that those and other variances are the cause of the church’s weakness, but that they are the evidences of more foundational disobediences, ignorances, and misalignments – evidences that man has taken over from God and made some improvements.

When in conversations along these lines exceptions are usually offered, that the church does many things according to Scripture. Yes, thank the Lord.

26. We are redeemed, alive in Christ, and seated with Him at the right hand of God our Father. Life completely and forever changed from the time of our rebirth. We are new creatures and it shows in every aspect of life. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Eternal life is an open road ahead of us. We are soon to see our Savior face-to-face. Hallelujah!

But the glory road has bumps, pot holes and sharp turns. The Chief Highway Engineer makes it that way. There are detours, and delays from one-way traffic through construction areas. Grief!! Why such troubles among all of the glory?

In His earth-life Jesus was given grief, and He grieved. It is normal for righteous ones to grieve. My question here is, “What causes your grief?” I can remember thinking that rich people were always happy, which is absolutely wrong. Financial success is burdensome at times to any soul, and the rich still have all of the common problems of life. Popularity does not insulate you from grief. Power can cause more grief than security.

To answer my question for myself, most of my grief was caused by me, directly and indirectly, due to unhealthy attitudes and self-centeredness. Yes, some was due to immaturity, some to outright sinfulness, and some due to plain stupidity – no excuses in any case. In that direction, I’m going to offer you something specific to sink your thinker into. How much of your grief has been caused by self-rejection? If you don’t have much experience with introspection, you may have to ponder for awhile. Self-rejection, like its fellow-traveler, shame, can be sneaky, their presence pernicious, and must and can be dealt with.

To deal with my grief [etc.], besides Himself, the Lord has given me a soul-cleanser labeled “Nancy.” There have been no untoward side-effects, she has lived up to her parents’ guarantee, and I have still not found an expiration date. She did come with a high-cost maintenance contract. What I’m saying is that others, particular others, can be God’s necessary instruments for navigating life’s inevitable bumps and detours and their consequences without leaving years-long or permanent scars.

27. God’s word has all of Himself in “it.” [Really, His word is not an “it” because “it” is also Himself.] He creates by His word. He watches over His word to be sure it succeeds [accomplishes all for which it was spoken, in the right way, and on schedule]. Those who pervert, twist or spin His word are in bad trouble, unless they are doing it in ignorance and without malice – Rom. 1:18.

No wonder then that God’s and our enemy, the devil, focuses on challenges to God’s word. He started doing that with humanity when he asked Eve if she might have understood God’s instructions just a bit: “Did God really say that?” or “Did God really mean it that way?” Challenging a person’s word or his emissary is the same as challenging the person face-to-face, and spitting into that face, or ridiculing Him by placing a crown of thorns on His head, or putting a royal robe on Him prior to His crucifixion.

When we are tempted we are enticed to go against God’s word, to go into perhaps maybe just an itty-bitty bit of rebellion. “Who, me; rebel against God?! No way!” But as Christians we are God’s ambassadors in this world – 2 Cor. 5:20. Ambassadors follow instructions, being careful to not go contrary to the instructions or the character of the King. Doing otherwise is rebellion, in whatever degree.

The tools of Satan’s deceptive and distractive trade are things like pain, trials, desires, fears, persistent struggles, disappointments, and delayed success. The list is almost endless, but they all have one purpose – to entice us into placing our attention on ourselves and off of the Lord and His word. That’s rebellion. No spin.

28. Before the Lord created humans, when nature and animals already existed, everything had consequences. But when He created humans and gave them moral responsibility, He modified the already established system of consequences in order to do something new with us. He split consequences into two groups – rewards and punishments. We are still the only part of creation that has moral responsibility. Perhaps the righteous and unrighteous angels should be included in our moral responsibility category.