THOUGHTS OF MAY, 2019

1. Resting on our laurels is being content with that which we have or have experienced, particularly with “my” part of it. But, if we have only that which we have experienced, we have nothing. Having that which is ahead gives us something! That sort of something is substance. Our futures are loaded with currently barely imaginable wonders. There are also barely imaginable tragedies for many, so spread the word, especially to those who do not have a personal relationship with the Lord. The time is 24 hours shorter than it was yesterday.
2. The world, including humanity, is in a recovery program. The Lord is restoring it, and us, to what which and who His creation is meant to be. He began with individuals, then with a “company,” then ultimately with His entire creation. The Bible is His story of that process, the progressive recovery of a world gone astray, its total inability to restore itself, and its Creator’s sole ability to do the job, and perfectly. The good news is that, in one phase of our restoration, God Himself came to earth and accomplished a great leap forward. He showed Himself able to become our all in all – 1 Cor. 15:28.

Our progressive recovery and the increase of Christ is going on in the midst of a world going further astray [have you noticed?]. It has “only started.” Rejoice in Christ Jesus because the best [and worst] is yet to come and it all depends on Him – Phil. 3:3. We are the responders, by His grace.

There are other phases of our recovery, one of which will be a 1,000-year time when the devil will be imprisoned in the pit, totally inactive on earth. Heavenly order will take a giant leap forward at that time. But wait; what is causing those ongoing problems at that time? Oh, my! Self is still here. The innate tendency in earthly humanity to put himself and his desires above God and others is still present. Alas! The devil was not the cause of all iniquity, after all! Getting rid of him did not cleanse creation of all wickedness. We are the biggest obstacle to the Christ-life. God’s recovery program needs another work of grace.

Not to fret. Nothing is too difficult for Him. It’s in the book – scattered throughout the Old Testament, more in the New Testament, especially in The Revelation of Jesus Christ. He has completed our recovery program. Check it out. Find what is required of and offered to us responders. The best is yet to come.

1. Here is a small test of your relative spirituality and carnality: “What do you have that did not come to you as a gift from God?” If your thinking and living is in the Spirit, your answer will be folded into 1 Peter 4:10. If, on the other hand, your thinking and living is in the flesh, you are on the verge of losing all that is yours, no matter how firmly you hold onto it.
2. Jesus spoke several times about how He was sent to lay down his life for the world, and that He was going to lay down His life for His sheep – John 10:18; 14:31. So, He did – Heb. 5:8-10. John heard Him say and saw Him do that, so guess what -- John did the same as Jesus had done – John 15:10. Then John said to you and me, “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren – 1 John 3:16.

Now describe to yourself how you are laying down your life for other believers. Try to not list the times that you simply tolerated them, or grinned and bore them, or acted out of a good sense of responsibility. Think of the times when you easily or deliberately gave of yourself or of your stuff when it was not a soul pain. Make that list for yourself and John. [Jesus already has it.]

I wonder; what does it take to lay down your life for another? Ask your mother and father, separately. Then ask them about rewards they have received from parenting you.

1. This series of Thoughts is on disciples keeping their peace, meaning staying calm, quiet and still inside and out. Our highest example is Jesus, especially from His arrest until His death about 30 hours later. He had said, “The ruler of this world [meaning Satan] is coming, and he has nothing in Me.” The purpose of discipleship is that the ruler of this world have nothing in us or, in the positive, that for us to live is Christ only.

The basic intent of our lives, including today, is to be and to make disciples of Jesus, as in Matthew 28:18-20, which reads, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

So, my and our intent is not to teach the Bible, to have Christian fellowship, or to pray for one another. We do all of that, and more, but our purpose is to make disciples of Jesus. That takes more than “presentations” because discipling requires personal, hands-on action. One evidence of being a disciple, a fairly advanced disciple, is peacefulness under duress. A disciple does not need to defend himself. A disciple does not need to eat, so fasting is a part of his life. A disciple knows that nothing can prevail over him. A disciple know that it might be better to endure a pain than avoid it. And a disciple knows that no one owes him anything. Not knowing those things places stumbling blocks before disciples.

In the beginning of our spiritual walk, keeping our peace seemed easy. We were born again, we had new life, and we thought, “everything is perfect and will surely stay that way!” We were also encouraged into general godliness by scripture like 2 Peter 1:2-8, and we thought, “Sure, that’s me.” As soon as appropriate, the Lord gently disillusioned us by showing us the way to our crosses.

Notice that Peter wrote those encouragements as generalities – diligence, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Generalities can be so broad and universal that we can’t use them to see, understand, and work faithfully within ourselves with the Holy Spirit. We can use some specifics. We need the details, to understand the workings, of our righteousness and unrighteousness, to help move us forward in a serious walk of faith during the short time we have in this life. We will see later in this Thought that the Lord already knew that we need specifics in order to deal with our frailties, and that He gave us specific scripture for that purpose. My focus today is on peace, which is the result of being discipled unto Jesus by mentors [by, but not unto, our mentors]. Peace is a powerful tool for disciples, and for us as we make disciples.

The end result in God’s discipleship project is to make every one of us like Jesus, the Prince of Peace, who was and is the human image of His Father. I almost explode when I take some time aside to meditate on the fact that I am going to be, “Like Jesus.” We are to become perfect, which is not only like Jesus but like our Father in heaven [Matt. 5:48] where Jesus said, “.. you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” I take that not as a command [because Jesus knew we were totally incapable of it], but as a prophetic word from Him to us. Being like our heavenly Father is our target, but is the most impossible possibility I can imagine [“except for the Lord!”] and His project is already underway. Thankfully, discipling is His idea, His plan, and His work. We have mentors, but we are His workmanship. Being discipled involves our yielding to the death of our “big ME,” bringing forth our confidence in His ability to give Life. On the other hand, discipling others involves our mentoring of others who have confidence in the Lord in us.

Coming back to the point of how it helps to know our hang-ups [meaning to understand the condition and workings of our souls] -- it shows us our hopeless condition and leads us to the Lord and His great ability. The Lord’s starting point is to show us our utterly lost condition with no ability to help ourselves. After all, that was the reason the Lord gave His Law to His people – to drive them and us to our knees at His feet asking for mercy and grace.

In the process, the Holy Spirit shows us more and more of Jesus. At special times He shows us ourselves, meaning the truth about our actions, which are guided by our souls, which in turn are controlled in our most secret place -- our hearts. Restating that sentence, our actions show us the condition of our souls, and our souls show us the condition of our hearts. Knowing that pathway of our actions really helps us see that we need help, from God and man.

Disciples learn to judge all things, beginning with ourselves, which is possible because, being possessed by and yielded to the Holy Spirit, we have the mind of Christ -- 1 Cor. 2:15-16. The “we” indicates that Christ’s mind is a corporate matter among disciples, at least the best of His mind that our corporate faith and righteousness can receive. That plurality is supported by verses like Proverbs 11:14 and 24:6, which say, “.. in an abundance of counselors there is victory [or safety].” It was also practiced by the New Testament saints as a part of their body of Christ life and is a testimony to us – 1 Cor. 1:10; Acts 11:18; 15:all. If you read my book, God’s Doctor, you know that the Lord unites brothers into His body, gives them a victorious cross-walk, gives them His mind, and does things like He did in His individual body but which are comparably scant in individual believers.

We won’t get sidetracked today on the similar subject of judging others; but recognize that we are to judge ourselves and that the Lord has especially equipped us, and is with us, for judging ourselves. As we grow in our discipleship, we grow in confidence so we can humbly judge ourselves and “all things” – 1 Cor. 2:15. It should be enough to say that we often need others’ help us to judge ourselves deeply and broadly, and that our flesh is reluctant to do that.

But we know what the Lord says about our hearts. We like to use terms like, “But in my heart I meant well,” or “I was wrong but my heart was pure in the matter.” The Lord, who knows our hearts, says things like, “.. the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth ..” – Gen. 8:21. That is what He said after the flood and added that He would never do that kind of thing again to humanity because it does no good -- it does not change man. It did other important things, but it did not help in His plan for making man like Jesus. He must change mankind from the inside out, so born-again believers are getting the long-promised new, soft heart. Our new heart breaks our previously unchangeable bondage to sin, although it does not make us immediately sinless.

Jeremiah [17:9-10] perceived by the Spirit that, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, [for the purpose of giving] to each man according to his way, according to the results of his deeds.” That is a four-part breakdown of what the Lord sees going on: starting with our hearts, then our minds [souls], our deeds, and even the effects of our deeds. All are known and evaluated and responded to by the Lord.

There is much else to say about the faith-walk and the righteousness of faith, but all of that is for another time. This Thought is on the importance of keeping our peace -- an ability and measure of the Lord’s work in His disciples.

Question: How easy have you found the laying down of your life? My answer: Difficult, until I saw Jesus as Someone worth dying for at every opportunity and began responding to the Holy Spirit’s grace. Thereafter I desired His purposes and was able to set my life’s course on His which, by the way, included allowing certain others to exercise authority over me. Then I found lying down my life to be less difficult and actually life-producing. In fact, in life’s more difficult times, dying to myself ASAP has created real opportunities, opened minds and borders, granted remarkable permissions, and softened hard hearts. It should be no surprise that I found I must re-set that cross-course daily, sometimes several times daily.

[A side note on the Lord’s plan for allowing others to exercise authority over us: It is not a new thought. We do that all the time in the natural settings of life – police, judges, city and national laws, income tax regulations, military, captains of aircraft and sailing vessels, firemen, employers, etc. All of those natural world-kingdom settings are forced on us. However, in spiritual equal-before-God-and-man relationships [which are non-forced kingdom of God settings] God’s word of allowing others to exercise authority over us equally applies – wives obey and submit to your husbands, children obey your parents, believers obey the leaders of the church, employees [slaves] obey your bosses [masters], and believers obey without compulsion those who have civil authority over you. Our proper submission to our established authorities is an indication of our submission to the Lord.] [Sub-note: In all positions of authority, some level of force may be occasionally necessary, but the less it is commonly used, the more graceful is the process and the end product.]

Special note: In the matter of sin, we must obey God, not man. In sin-matters, we must disobey man, and take whatever consequences may come. Decisions that are wrong or outright stupid do not mean that they are sinful, so we should give our input, if possible, and then be supportive.

Self-discipline is required when our immediate and easy application of obedience does not flow. Discipline is also known as self-control, one of the results of yielding to the Holy Spirit over time and through events – Gal. 5:22-24. The two classes of discipline are self-discipline and others’-discipline of us. Discipline is not a popular concept in the modern western world, whether self-discipline or others’-discipline, in or out of the church. That helps us understand why some automatically consider themselves disciples as soon as their names are added to the church’s role but so few are “made disciples.” A “made disciple” is someone who has been disciplined into discipleship by others who had been disciplined,” just like Jesus was discipled by His Father, and His disciples were discipled by Him. Disciplining or mentoring brothers is simply being your younger brothers’ keepers [at least the ones who want to be disciplined], with the focus of giving your life to them.

At the Church of the Redeemer-Episcopal in Houston, Texas, where I was disciplined from the beginning of my spiritual walk in 1964, life was active, full, and remarkably peaceful. There were times when we were stressed, but we were still a peaceful bunch. Stressful times, such as a death, sickness or someone’s apostasy, or during times when we needed the Lord’s direction, still brought peace. The Holy Spirit’s presence was especially present at certain times in worship when, usually after a time of praise, all would become quiet and still, producing a time of “spiritual pregnancy” when we knew the Lord was about to do something in the meeting. And He did, whether it was in a meeting or a difficult time.

Isaiah [30:15(a)] wrote to God’s people for the Lord, saying: “For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said, ‘In repentance [or “returning to Him”] and rest [or “peace of soul”] you will be saved; in quietness and trust is your strength.’” The indication is that the Lord uses situations of conviction, soul-pain, unquietness, and weakness [situations that in the natural would cause us to lose our peace] so we can maintain or return to our positions of trust and peace, and continue our spiritual growth. Romans 8:28 has always been true, not only after Paul wrote it. Disciples faced, recognized and passed that test many times in the Old and New Testament days.

We are currently here in this world to grow us and others spiritually. Why else?! God’s project is to make us like Jesus, who was the human image of God. So, the Lord customizes and details our individual lives, including our trials, routines, blessings, and hair growth. He is serious, and He is able. It really is His intent to make us like His eldest son, Jesus. The only way we can be like Jesus is to be like Jesus.

Calmness and peacefulness of soul destroys evil. Yielding to agitation and irritation destroys righteousness.

Don’t even rush to destroy evil. Stand firm, be still, knowing that the Lord is God. Strike [meaning in prayer, verbally, physically, financially, etc.] when the time is ripe, or perhaps not at all, because peace is faith in full-bloom. Just in itself, peace is God on the attack.

Peace is not only for when we have tried everything but nothing worked, “so then it was time to trust God.” Peace is a permanent part of the disciple. Trust, defined as the use of faith, keeps us peaceful and on top in the fight.

If you are not the sharpest mind around, or not the highest educated, or not a prestigious person, you can still be the most peaceful. Just by being peaceful we have the opportunity to show Christ’s character, and in the process become more righteous. Others notice, and some will gather with us only because of our peacefulness. Standing peacefully still in our souls gets us ready for what’s next, even when we don’t know what is next, or when we know it will be costly.

Calmness is a fruitful time for listening, planning and doing. It is a time for changing from the defense to the offence, or from the offence to the defense. Remaining at peace in an adverse encounter can prolong the contact and conversation, thus allowing our opponent the opportunity to align with us and the Lord. Examples: Mr. Rogers at the U. S. - Mexico border, Richard Wurmbrand tortured for years in prison in Romania, Mexican army sergeant in La Concordia [you may call me for those testimonies alive].

Peacefulness reduces folly and foolishness. A personal testimony: “When you are interrupted, that’s Me. Don’t say what you were about to say, even if you again have the opportunity” – God to me. Over the years I and others have benefitted from that word from my Teacher.

Have you had opportunity to keep your peace [to be quiet] and stay calm in the following detailed-for-us situations:

Prov. 27:5 – Open rebuke.

Prov. 27:6 – Wounds of a friend. Surprising and especially painful. Love him.

Prov. 27:15-16 – Constant dripping. On and on and on and …..

Prov. 27:17 – Iron sharpening iron. Strife between brothers.

Prov. 27:18 – Tending a fig tree; cares for a “master.” Both take time and labor, then reward.

Prov. 27:19 – Keeping your peace when you see your heart. It’s not always a good view.

Prov. 27:20 – Peace when you really want to say, do, or buy something.

1. One of our denominations, often called “the high and the old,” is currently laboring over:
2. The theology of marriage,
3. The authority of the church,
4. The authority of scripture, and
5. The nature of their symbols.

My most benevolent comment is that our Father is searching for those who will worship Him in spirit and truth – John 4:23. There are many other kinds of religious worship, and those modeled somewhat after Christian worship are broadly available. But God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth – v. 24. The words of Jesus are truth; there are those who do not believe that but everyone who is of the truth hears His voice – John 18:37. Spiritual worship is even more out of the reach of the natural mind than is the truth. Lord, grant grace for repentance, cleansing leading to humility, and hearts to hunger for discipleship.

1. In the kingdoms of this world, modern dictators always appeal to the greater good of society as they trample on individual rights. In old times the dictators simply stomped they way onto the stage and took authority by brute power. In these days, dictators use shallow subterfuge. They deceive the masses by promising the people gifts through him, plus doing things for their good which involves their sacrifice. In the kingdom of God, no lie or deception or stomping on any unfortunate one justifies the supposed benefit.
2. We are created in the image of God, which gives us personal responsibility and grants us approachability to Him. We are not animals. We are His honored creation, especially after we have been born again by His Spirit into His eternal family. That is an unimaginable honor, but He has destined us for more than rebirth. Starting here on earth, the Lord gives us spiritual gifts for us to employ according to His/our rightly forming conscience and obedience so we can serve Him and our neighbors His way. We cannot be hidden because our character and giftings show who and Whose we are. On the social level, we are equipped to bring about the kingdom of God on earth, which is a freed society grounded in the spirit of truth. That’s only our earthly beginnings.
3. How have you come to have your present set of moods and attitudes? They are the result of a multitude of involvements, are they not? After being born again by the Spirit, we have lept and crept forward toward having the moods and attitudes of Jesus. How?

The Lord was telling the disciples [and us] about some of the difficult times they would encounter. In Luke 21:19 He said, “By your endurance you will gain your lives [souls].” And in Philippians chapter 2 Paul wrote [by the same Spirit] about godly character, supplied us information on what that was and gave instructions for promoting it among us and within ourselves. Basically, he said to become like Jesus we need to follow Jesus’ way of the cross. Those and many other verses sound like we have something of responsibility for not coming short of God’s grace – 2 Cor. 6:1; Gal. 2:21; Heb. 12:15.

Back to our moods and attitudes, and any other emotion. The Lord wants us to have a grip on ourselves, to be rich in the spiritual fruit of self-control and patience – which are very important if we are going to 1) control the expression of our flesh and 2) grow in Christ’s character. We have to take possession of ourselves [our souls]. That’s a very active and ongoing activity. It’s a creative activity, part of having a faithful imagination which develops creativity, which makes us more like God.

So, we are to have a hand in being makers of our character, which is an expression of our freedom and self-responsibility. Not that we need his agreement, but Aristotle wrote that those who act rightly become accomplished people. I will add that it is obvious that, whether in sports, education or the molding of our souls, our everyday commitment to [meaning knowledge and acceptance of] the Lord’s ways results in the betterment of our performance; in this case our character. Practicing over and over results in our not wanting “the other.” That works in our souls, bodies, minds, etc. In our endurance we gain our souls – paraphrasing Luke 21:19 just a bit.

Hang in there all you [us] Jobs. It is within our souls that the choice things of the kingdom grow.

1. Are you one of the elect of God? [Yes; He chose me! – Eph. 2:1-10.] Are you one of the very elect of God? [Matt. 24:24 KJV; possibly, but I/we don’t know yet who those very elite ones may be. Their standard of resistance against deception must be very high, but not perfect.] Are you able to be deceived by the world, the flesh and the devil? [Yes. As long as I am in this imperfect flesh the enticing things of the world, the desires of my own flesh, and the spiritual powers of the devil can be effective against me.]

What do you think of our president, Donald Trump? [I think he is an unpolished and immature believer who has tremendous talent, wisdom and strength of character, whom the Lord chose as our president at this time – Rom. 13:1.] Is he God’s “man of the hour” for America, Israel, and the world? [It appears that he is, once you get past the flack of the many and powerful who hate him.] What are the chances that a person like him could become the anti-christ? [It would take an ultimate deception, but that certainly will be the nature of deception at that time.] See Mark 13:20-23. I used President Trump as a possible example so that Trump-lovers and Trump-haters could perceive the deceptive set-up that will be used on the world when the anti-christ is unveiled.

What can we say regarding the Lord’s provision for our being prepared to resist being deceived? [Discussion – the Lord’s provision for our safety is scripture [knowing, believing and obeying], knowledge of world and local events [from trusted sources], listening to and obeying the Holy Spirit [while rejecting other spirits], participation in the joint mind of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16b, but ultimately we still depend on the Lord to act on our behalf at all times because while in this body we are still deceivable.]

1. Some points on reading scripture: Isaiah 19:16-25. Notice the progressive understandability of that set of verses, the necessity of knowing scripture and world events past and present, and the need for tying all together into a scenario consistent with the rest of scripture. Those verses produce a spiritual thrill in me as I see the Lord fulfill His purposes – bringing Egypt to Himself, plus peace and the worship of Jesus in Israel, Assyria and Egypt. The verses end with, “Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.” What a way to end the story of those wayward nations!
2. Describe the Bible’s description of heaven, presently and ultimately [the progressive revelation of heaven to us, and heaven’s ongoing changes]. Scripture mentions three heavens: 1) The first heaven where there is air, birds fly, clouds float and winds blow. 2) The second heaven which is space filled with stars, etc. 3) The third heaven, the New Jerusalem, or heaven of heavens, the place of God’s residence, and God’s angels.

This third heaven is currently “up” but will [after the millennium] come down upon a beautifully resurfaced earth [like Adam and Eve were first placed into] and remain here. This is the usual picture of heaven in our minds, but we are not going “up” to be in it there. It will come down to us here on earth – Rev. 21.

Remember that the first “holding place” of the faithful, for those who died before Jesus’ completed work on the cross, was “down” below earth’s surface – Luke 16:19-31. There the righteous beggar was resting with faithful Abraham in Paradise. When Jesus died on the cross, He descended into that first hell [see below] and preached the gospel [Luke 23:43], which was necessary for the Old Testament saints to accept before they could go “up” along with the new location of their holding place. Jesus then took those righteous “captives” and their place of captivity up into the third heaven – Eph. 4:8-10.

So, the deceased believers of the past 2,000 years, and the soon-to-be raptured believers, have been going “up” but not yet into God’s presence in the New Jerusalem heaven. They go up to the third heaven into a “holding place” but not into God’s presence in His New Jerusalem. They are in a wonderful place [apparently adjusted according to the age and experience of the believer]. They may see other believers such as deceased family members, and may see Jesus, but not God the Father and His residence. The believers have not yet been sorted out [judged] and have not yet been adequately “matured” into Christ’s likeness, so cannot enter into their Holy Father’s presence. That time will come, but the processes of earth life, earth death, holding place, judgment, Jesus’ marriage and wedding dinner, return to earth with Christ, millennium, Satan’s brief return to earth, his defeat and ultimate incarceration have not yet been completed.

1. Describe the Bible’s description of hell: The lake of eternal fire and brimstone [burning Sulphur] was created for Satan and his angels – Matt. 25:41. Who else will be there? It is the place of eternal torment for the damned, after they are judged by God at the great white throne judgement.
2. There were three hells during the Old Testament days. Since the first hell [Paradise] was emptied or taken “up,” there are now only two hells – the third hell [the eventual place of the damned] and the second hell [the temporary holding place of the unrighteous from the beginning until their judgement at the great white throne judgment].

Hell is called a dark place, not because of a natural darkness but because of its total lack of God’s presence [God is Light]. Its residents are filled with nothing but deep sorrow, remorse, harassment, rage, despair, gnashing of teeth, and utter loss.

1. Will life for believers in heaven, and those unbelievers in hell, be the same for all those others present with them? [No; there is variable recompense for those in hell and variable recompense for those in heaven, based on their performance/deeds/actions while in their earth life, including unrepentant and unforgiven sins. The reason for believers’ judgment at the judgment seat of Christ [2 Cor. 5:10] is not for determination of heaven vs. hell, but for being recompensed in heaven according to their deeds, and the reason for unbelievers’ judgement by the Father at the great white throne judgment [Rev. 20:11-15] is not for determination of heaven vs. hell, but for being recompensed in hell according to their deeds.

Remember that humans are in heaven due to their faith in Jesus [not because of their good deeds], and in hell because they have rejected Jesus [not because of their bad deeds]. There is no salvation except through personal acceptance of Jesus Christ’s work at the cross, which shows because of the Spirit’s work in and through us –1 Cor. 9-11; Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 9:21. We cannot be good enough to get to heaven, and once we are born again [the Lord having placed His Spirit within us for the specific purpose and assurance of our eternal salvation and for producing good works while on earth, see below – Eph. 2:10] we cannot be bad enough to be beyond redemption. But, there will be differences between us when we get there. He wants us to know that. It’s in His Handbook for that purpose.

TWO ASIDE NOTES: 1) There is some biblical indication that those who have never had the opportunity to accept or reject salvation through Jesus Christ will be judged for their faithfulness to that which was revealed of God in His creation – Rom. 1:20; 2:12-16. Nothing is said of their eternal situation, meaning heaven vs. hell, and since there are the two judgment seats, they may be among those judged at the Father’s great white throne judgment. 2) We are saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves, which gives us the nature, inclination and power to do good works. But we are saved for good works. That is a major purpose for our salvation, and He gives us His Spirit Who is required in us for us to accomplish His purposes/works. Some consider that the lack of good works in a professing believer is evidence of his not being saved, which means they could be classified among Jesus’, Paul’s and Peter’s and our plague of “false brethren” – Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22; Acts 15:5 (4-12); 2 Cor. 11:12-15, 26; Gal. 2:4; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 2 Peter 2:all.

1. Are you one of the elect of God? [Yes; He chose (elected) me! – Eph. 2:1-10] Are you one of the very elect of God? [Matt. 24:24 KJV; possibly, but I/we don’t know yet who those very elect ones may be. Their standard of resistance against deception must be very high, but not perfect, because God had to cut off the devil’s time of powerful deception in order to prevent the deception of the very elect.] Are you able to be deceived by the world, the flesh and the devil? [Yes. As long as I am in this imperfect flesh the enticing things of the world, the desires of my own flesh, and the spiritual powers of the devil can be effective against me.]

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What can we say regarding the Lord’s provision for our being prepared to resist being deceived? [Discussion – the Lord’s provision for our safety is scripture [knowing, believing and obeying it], knowledge of world and local events [from trusted sources], listening to and obeying the Holy Spirit [while rejecting other spirits], participation in the joint mind of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16b), but ultimately we must still depend on the Lord to act on our behalf because while in this body we are still deceivable.]

1. In Acts chapter 10 the Lord sent Peter to a Roman centurion’s house. The Lord had prepared Cornelius, a Gentile, for responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ although he had not yet heard the message. In fact, it took a while for the Lord to get Peter into sufficient spiritual condition to obey the Lord’s order to, “Just go.” Peter obeyed and his words had immediate and eternal effect on Cornelius and many others. My point is that Peter’s ministry results had almost everything to do with Cornelius, and little to do with Peter and his preaching ability. The Lord said, “Go,” Peter went, and Cornelius responded. In the least, that demonstrated the Lord’s good stewardship of Peter’s time, did it not? No wasted time, effort or energy. If we will wait for and be sensitive to the Lord, we will not throw seed on rocky ground [Luke 8:6] or give pearls to pigs – Matt. 7:6. We will be more profitable servants.
2. May 18, 2019 was Israel’s 71st anniversary. On May 18, 1948 God regathered Israel and they became a nation in one day [Is. 66:8] by an act of God and a proclamation of the United Nations. For 1,900 years they had been a defeated, scattered and persecuted people – defeated in battle by armies, scattered all over the world, and greatly persecuted in every way. While they were out of the Land [although a very small remnant always remained], there was a 1,900-year drought [no or little rain] with regular pestilences – until Israel’s regathering. Since then the Land has flourished. I was 18 at the time of the restoration of Israel as a nation [the fig tree putting forth new life], which makes me and millions of others who were alive that day very significant, biblically – Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32. Keep looking up.
3. Everything changes except the Lord and His word. Some changes are good, some not good. This “change for today” Thought is about the church’s chief servants – apostles. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4 that apostles [and certain other humble chief servants] were for 1) equipping of the saints to do the church’s work, 2) the building up of the church [the church is people, only], 3) until the church comes together in complete unity, 4) until we all agree about Jesus Christ, 5) until the church is a full-grown, adult body like was Jesus during His earthly days, 6) until the church no longer falls for man’s deceitful religious schemes, 7) but has learned to live by the truth enacted in love at any cost, 8) is grown up in every way exactly like Jesus because He in every way is functioning as the head of the church, 9) until the church’s only adhesive power is Jesus because He deftly picks and individually equips its members and personally fits them together as only He can, and 10) then He causes the church to water itself with His love. That simple description of the apostle’s business in the church is a simple description of the church’s life, which is a simple description of Jesus’ life in His church, which is a display of the ability of Jesus’ love, which is available to you, to me, and to all those others of the church today. That is an example of our need for changes, the good ones.

In view of the Lord’s statements on the present and always need for apostles, it is difficult to argue against the broad and deep need for the ongoing, living, available apostolic ministry, but much contrariness occurs. We have the apostolic teachings in scripture, and that is not to be diminished by the presence of living apostles and their administration of scripture and Spirit. For many years it was taught that the ministry of the apostle had passed away. [The same was taught about the occurrence of miracles, healings, prophecy, and other supernatural actions.] However, in the 1900s, the Lord began correcting those errors. One of the later 1900s corrections was the recognizable return of apostles to the church. They had always been there, but unofficially and unrecognizable to the natural eye.

But, especially in America, with the enhancement of movies, television and the internet, apostleship became a religious fad. People were [and still are] desirous of dictators and controllers, someone who will control circumstances and provide for them that which only the Lord can control and provide – 1 Sam. 8. In many and obvious cases, Jesus’ humility became a lost Holy Spiritual apostolic art. Total allegiance to the apostle, his ownership of their property, tithing to him, and his spiritual guarantees for their obedience became commonplace in his ministry. The precious gift of apostle and apostolic covering was for sale.

But God! The reduced value of His precious gift may obscure His true apostolic ministry, but not stop it. There are many wonderful apostles, and I will venture to say [from the viewpoint of my one-man vision] that most of them are in third world nations like China, India, and the Islamic nations. Their lives and ministries are like those of Jesus and Paul; they are servants. Being appointed to first position in the church [1 Cor. 12:28] has not sat them on the throne of an ecclesiastical hierarchy.

No, being first is not about being on top. As far as that sort of pecking order is concerned, apostles are on the bottom where the other foot-washers are located. And because they lay the foundations, their works are often hidden by the works of other ministers who follow them. And that is fine with true apostles. They are not looking for titles or fame. Their role is foundational, meaning to empower everyone else in Christ. They are entitled to earthly rewards [Luke 10:7], but shun them, as did Paul in his tentmaking – Acts 18:3; 20:33-35.

Lord, I suppose that we must have false apostles among us, so our prayer is that everywhere you raise up true apostles who will have your marks of courage, integrity and humility.

1. Let’s have another go at socialism, man’s political attempt to create heaven on earth. Understand that there is no political system that can do that, but as the end nears and things get worse, humanity will turn more and more to socialism and the utopian promises of its elite leaders. Heaven on earth will come but not until we actually have actual heaven on earth – Rev. 21. Before then we have had, are having, and will have progressive and regressive expressions of heaven on earth.

Four earthly expressions of heaven on earth are: 1) The Old Testament political condition as God-selected humans did their best to make life safe and enjoyable [Kings David and Solomon are good examples.], 2) Our New Testament political conditions as Christian, christianoid, other religious, and atheistic leaders and populaces do their best to do the same [kings, republics, theocracies], 3) A few years of tribulation under the supposed Christ [the anti-christ], 4) During the coming millennium when Jesus our perfect dictator, His resurrected saints [that’s us], and natural humans will be part of the best-yet but imperfect example of heaven on earth, and then 5) Life on earth when its surface has been again perfected and God and His residence [the heavenly Jerusalem] come down to create the real heaven on earth.

The requirements for heaven on earth are: 1) a perfect dictator and 2) perfect subjects. That’s why we won’t have heaven on earth until we actually have heaven on earth. In the meantime, the world, the flesh and the devil continue to [only apparently] try to establish the perfect kingdom by politics, force, and deception. There certainly are good, mediocre, and bad political systems – all very imperfect even at their best.

The flaws in socialism are: 1) It restricts freedoms under the guise of creating freedom, 2) It increases government power and control by imagined elites, 3) It discourages imagination and energy, thus is a disaster in both spiritual and material terms, 4) It divides society into classes and sets them against each other, 5) It destroys the soul of society by creating greed, discouraging work and encouraging a slave mentality [watch the socialists on television as they fuel perpetual anger and victimology], and 6) it declares itself to be a god [succor, leadership, etc.] so that the populace will look to it for everything and obey in everything. Socialism offers a totalitarian utopia. That is Satan’s copy of the kingdom of God.

The Lord has granted humanity freedom far beyond our ability to use it correctly, but socialism is based on the removal of freedom [replacing freedom with controls and force], which is not the answer to human frailty or the Lord would have chosen such [or greater] control during our six millennia of wandering in our post-Edenic wilderness.

1. Law and order are not the only things falling apart in Mexico. The newspaper El Imparcial reports 25,000 cases of tuberculosis in Mexico City, where it is the leading cause of death. It does not take a physician to know that a medical disaster is happening there, and that it is spreading silently across worldwide borders.
2. What is your definition of a Christian? Is it someone who believes in Jesus Christ, and makes faithful efforts to live right? That’s good, but it misses the Lord’s definition that includes His secret about being an effective believer. Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” That’s the secret, the truth, and also the way. A Christian is someone who is crucified with Christ and has no life of his own. When we accept that as truth, transformational truth, and begin reminding ourselves of its truthfulness and effectiveness in our lives, we are changed by the Holy Spirit according to our faith. That is the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith – Phil. 3:9 (7-11). We are the righteousness of God in Christ – 2 Cor. 5:21. The end result in our pursuit of righteous is, “That which we believed is now that which we have become.”
3. A Thought on “the age of miracles.” Physical, mental, situational, etc. miracles abound, even in our unbelieving America. They are documented in religious, medical and secular writings, and testified to publicly by thousands, including in my own body and life. After Jesus left, believers have continued seeing the Holy Spirit do miracles and, in general, unbelievers have not, especially if part of their unbelief is that the age of miracles has passed.

However, the grandest time of miracles [even more grand than was the time of Jesus on earth] is ahead of us. There is coming a time when every tear will be wiped from believers’ eyes, none of them will die, and there will be no sadness or crying or pain. All those sorts of conditions will be done away with, completely – Rev. 21:4. Thankfully, I can testify that current life is good in every way, but not yet that good!

I cannot pass on the opportunity to share with you some of God’s more recent glory of His healing in my body, some by His bare hand alone, some with His addition of medical involvement. You may notice that all are at least associated with aging.

1) Three or four years ago the Lord healed my knees. They had been broken in an automobile accident over 40 years ago and had become more continually painful, weak, and disabled over that time. After the Lord instructed me to go on a seven-day water-only fast, which I completed, [two days later] I noticed that He had completely healed them. He did not tell me that He was going to do that, or that He had done it. I have no disability or pain in my knees, and I am often on my stationary exercise bike.

2) For over 30 years I have had increasing pain and disability in my low back. X-rays and scans have all shown advanced degenerative disease of the lumbo-sacral spine. I crept about at times, mainly for a time after arising from sitting. A few months ago, all of my pain ceased and I have noticed increased flexibility in all directions. He did not tell me that He was going to do that, or that He had done it.

3) Every two or three months I visit my dermatologist, who removes eight or ten skin lesions which have been caused by my life-long exposure to the sun. He and the Lord heal them. [Remember that I said the Lord healed some of me by His bare hand, and some with natural involvement.]

4) About 6 years ago one of those skin cancers spread into my neck before we found it. A local surgeon removed one lymph node from my neck, which was positive for the spread of the cancer. After prayer and the laying on of faithful hands, plus a prophetic word that I was healed, I went to M. D. Anderson Cancer Hospital [Matt. 8:4; Mark 1:44; Luke 5:14, 17:14], where they removed 63 lymph nodes from that side of my neck. All were negative for cancer. After a series of “just in case” neck irradiation therapy, and five years of follow-up examinations, I have been dismissed from their medical care.

5) This miracle is a little one with a great amount of appreciation for it. As time and miles have accumulated in this 89-year-old body, general aches and pains have developed and have become like old but unappreciated friends. I have occasionally taken Tylenol for pain relief. But now I have noticed that [because of my healed knees] the more regularly I exercise on my stationary bike the less [or none] of those aches and pains I have. That work of healing is of the Lord mostly through physical therapy-type means.

Some of you recall that 55 years ago when the Lord baptized me with His Holy Spirit and began doing the miraculous in, through and around me, I thought I was faced with the choice of continuing in the practice of medicine or becoming a full-time preacher-healer. My Spirit-led and brothers-agreed decision was that I should be both. I became convinced that all healing was of the Lord, and that any mix of the spiritual and physical was up to Him – my business was to be and do both. The age of miracles marches on, with a mixed amount of both from time to time in my life.

Jesus is the Lord of all. He has the preeminence over all things. It does not yet show in the natural at all times but we know it is true because we know Him and believe His word. Miracles give us a glimpse of the future. That which we consider miraculous now will be commonplace in the future. We can rest in that.

1. If you are a student of God’s word, of His deeper thoughts, of those only occasionally revealed in His words, you may need to refer to several commentaries on this one. In Ezekiel 20:25 He says of His people Israel, “I also gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live; ..” As in Romans 1:21-28 He “turned them over” to sin and death. It is the Lord who is the mind and power behind all things. He brought the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, and others against His people for their punishment and for their eventual return to Him for their redemption.

All power in heaven and on earth is His, and He uses it, whether through believers, unbelievers, the devil, etc. of His creation. He speaks badly of evil, yet He created evil for His purposes and He uses it – Is. 45:7. As you know, the Old Testament is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. The Old Testament was given to us New Testament believers for examples, for our instructions. We should read, remember, and heed them. The Lamb of God is also the Lion of Judah.

1. There is no victory without a fight, no crown without a cross, and no testimony without a test. And testimony is not a thing that is said but a life that is lived.
2. Speaking of apostasy: “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer – 1 Tim. 4:1-5. That covers a multitude of eating and drinking situations. I easily venture to say that the Holy Spirit knew about cholesterol, drunkenness, and gluttony when He inspired Paul to write that, but if someone’s conscience is violated by some food or drink, they should not violate their conscience – but they should not think that their conscience is necessarily for others.
3. Do you need a dose of feeling small, ignorant and unimportance? It is a good medicine to many of us, at least briefly. This is it: “Scientists believe that there may be as many as twenty-four dimensions in this universe, of which we only know five.” That diminishes me; I know only three. Four or five are other dimensions that I cannot even nearly get my mind to touch, much less around twenty-four. It’s like reading Aristotle. Perhaps you grasp more than my three.
4. The Bible is full of important and vital information, much of which is found nowhere else. For example: God’s goal for this world is a one world government [the kingdom of God], one world leader [Jesus], one world religion [Christianity], and possibly a one world currency [the shekel?]. Satan’s goal for this world is to counterfeit God with a one world government [Rev. 13:17], one world leader [Rev. 13:2; Dan. 7:4-7], one world religion [Rev. 13:8], and one world currency [Rev. 13:16-18]. Knowing the Lord and living with Him is vital, especially as the present end-time apostasy, anarchy and deception increases. Life is becoming even more exciting.
5. Dios sea contigo.