THOUGHTS OF JUNE, 2017

1. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:16 that he did not know/recognize/relate to anyone according to what that person was in his flesh. He admitted to having known/recognized/related to Jesus Christ according to His flesh [the carpenter turned prophet] but that he no longer k/r/r to Him in that way. That’s a great statement, and it stirs some questions, like how did Paul relate to Jesus in His flesh [murderously], how did Peter relate to Jesus in His flesh [as a privileged friend and disciple], how did James (Jesus’ half-brother) relate to Jesus in His flesh [as a family member who was emotionally disturbed], and how did Jesus’ mother Mary relate to Jesus in His flesh [as a beloved son who was emotionally disturbed, especially in His religion]. During His earthly lifetime, everyone related to Him according to His flesh. That was all they were given to know Him by, although they were given fragile, temporary peeks into His greater identity. What a change came over and within them when they were granted more!
2. This thought is too good to digest and re-phrase, so I will quote it: "If you don´t see the greatness of God then all the things that money can buy become very exciting. If you can´t see the sun you will be impressed with a street light. If you´ve never felt thunder and lightning you´ll be impressed with fireworks. And if you turn your back on the greatness and majesty of God you´ll fall in love with a world of shadows and short-lived pleasures." -- John Piper [1946 – present], American Calvinist Baptist preacher.
3. A word to those who may read this Thought after we believers have disappeared. The Lord has taken us out of the world [“raptured” us]. You and the world are in the season of earth’s final countdown before the Lord Jesus returns in seven years from the time of our recent departure. If you are reading this, know that you have a short time before terrible things begin to happen during those seven years.

Find a Bible. In the part called “2 Thessalonians,” in chapter 2, verses 9 through 12, Paul warns you that a man called “the antichrist” will be an apparently wonderful man but will actually be an evil, deceptive person. He will have satanic powers and do miracles and wonders that are lies. Paul called them “lying wonders.” They are not real, supernatural miracles like the Lord does them.

With the human technology currently available, and much more following almost every day, it will be possible to fake all sorts of powers, miracles and wonders that are not truly supernatural. Artificial intelligence, robots, and technology able to beam electronics into the ionosphere where it will get supercharged and then be discharged back onto the earth in a well-timed, dynamic action that looks like an act of God will be in the hands of evil charlatans. Broadcasting 3-D images anywhere as touchable 3-D holograms, and much more, will exceed your common human knowledge. You will be deceived into thinking that the anti-christ has the power of genuine miracles, making him, according to his claim, the living “God.” He is not!

If you do not turn to the Lord Jesus now, it will soon be too late. And turning to the Lord now will not guarantee a peaceful remaining life on earth for you and your loved ones. It will bring lots of trouble and possibly your physical death. But, that cost will have a tremendous payoff in the next few years and forever.

Soon, the Lord will be sending a deluding influence on those who do not turn to Him. That will close the doors to salvation. You will believe all of the antichrist’s lies. Then, despite God’s previous warnings, you will take the mark of the beast so you will not be shut out of commerce -- buying and selling. It will seem reasonable to take his mark because without it all avenues of commerce will be closed to you – no food, no medical care or medicine, no electricity, no gas or oil, no water system, no commerce at all.

Today is your day to decide your eternity.

1. A movement of God by His Spirit is obviously of His doing, for those who have spiritual eyes, because it has Jesus as its clear focus. As time passes [years, generations], the focus tends to shift. Some other identity develops, and it ceases being an ongoing movement of God. Deceptive things like “keeping the church going” become more important than Jesus. At that point, those who want a deeper and more meaningful relationship with Jesus will seek Him elsewhere, and will find Him, because that’s what He wants with them.
2. Thanks to J.D. I have been mulling over the question of “What are the most over-looked ministries of the church?” I have asked that question in a couple of Bible Studies and found a number of suggested omissions. My best personal observation is that the church lacks ministry to adult singles who do not want to remain single.

My being a practical, meat and potatoes person, my approach to a ministry to those particular saints would be along the line of improving their bodies [gaining or losing weight], cleaning up their speech, bathing more often, growing a beard or shaving one off, improving their table manners, learning to cook or to express appreciation to cooks, getting a job or a different job, and the list is endless.

When I went through that suggestion with some clear-minded saints they suggested that such a program would run off most of the singles group. As I have pondered their response, I think that those who would be run off by some essential truths are currently responsible for running off their prospective mates. That’s an impasse. Suggestions?

1. Matthew’s lineage of Jesus Christ is a list that includes Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. It is unusual that an old-time Hebrew lineage includes women, without providing comment as to why they are included, and that some of those four were not so righteous.

Tamar was a righteous Israelite, widowed multiple times, who lived among selectively obedient relatives. She devised an eventually successful scheme for marrying her father-in-law, although he scorned her after their marriage ceremony. Rahab was a Canaanite harlot who believed the obvious about God and acted upon her belief, eventually joining in life with the Israelites. Ruth was a Moabites who married an Israelite, was widowed, committed to her also-widowed mother-in-law, and then married a prominent, faithful Israelite. Bathsheba was married, committed adultery with David, married David after he had her husband killed, had the child [which died], and had four more children. The oldest was Solomon, who became the next king of Israel.

That is a mixed bag who are related by personal faith in the Lord! He is full of grace, and will not deny His children who are His through faith, despite our sins. And He does not “hide them in the closet until the company leaves.”

1. There are endless varieties of people, and all of us have a bit of each type, from hero to traitor, from fearless to wimp, etc. It is a great blessing to ourselves, and to those we love who have failed, if we can see a least some of ourselves in every type. When we can identify with both the hero and traitor, we are blessed with insightfulness that helps keep us humble, and helps us have effective compassion for our fallen brothers. A brief list of some of those varieties:
2. The wise – They recognize and listen to truth. The result is that they increase in wisdom. The events of their lives make real sense to them, especially when they understand them by faith only. The effect of their presence with others is that they produce more wise ones. They embrace repentance as if a warm, soapy shower after a grimy day of labor.
3. The foolish – They adjust the truth to suit themselves. A bit of tweaking [of the truth, not of themselves] results in more folly. They have a peculiar application of God, life, and logic to themselves. They grant themselves and others the right to do unconventional things that simply do not fit or produce goodness. They equate repentance with being sorry, which produces no change of ways.
4. The evil – They want to inflict pain, are quickly judgmental, and are strong fault-finders. They must have justice! They produce other suffers who gripe and torment others. There is no repentance or insight in their lives.
5. We were created in God’s image. One aspect of being in God’s image is that we are creators. He created something out of nothing. We can’t do that [yet?], but we do create something out of something. We create babies and adults, wealth and poverty, peace and war, solutions and problems, order and disorder. But we don’t really create like the Lord creates. Our creations are really tinkerings, innovations, shifts, modifications, and cultivations. But our creations make us feel good, and even godly. If they are comely or beneficial, we look at them and call them “good,” like the Lord did – Gen. 1. Thus we get a taste of how God felt when He created something good.
6. “Character cannot be summoned at the moment of crisis if it has been squandered by years of compromise and rationalization. The only testing ground for the heroic is the mundane. The only preparation for that one profound decision which can change a life, or even a nation, is those hundreds of half-conscious, self-defining, seemingly insignificant decisions made in private. Habit is the daily battleground of character” – Dan Coats [1943-present], Director of National Intelligence of the United States, U. S. Senator from Indiana, U. S. Ambassador to Germany, Staff Sergeant U. S. Army, President of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, co-chair of the Center for Jewish and Christian Values, founder of the Foundation for American Renewal.

Righteous character can be helped to develop by reading the Bible and other good books, but it is through trials [conflict: maintaining unity, painful separation, speaking up, being quiet, considered actions] that it is firmly established.

1. Lex orandi, lex credenda – “as we pray, so we believe,” or “the law of praying is the law of believing.”
2. “Having first gained all you can, and secondly saved all you can, then give all you can” – John Wesley [1703-1791], co-founder of the Methodist Church, English Anglican minister, having translated this from the Greek of the Byzantine Fathers.
3. “When a society is perishing, the wholesome advice to give to those who would restore it is to call it to the principles from which it sprang” – Pope Leo XIII [1810-1903].
4. Jesus came to do only His Heavenly Father’s will, and that’s what He did. His Father must have told Him to make disciples, because He did. Before Jesus left, He told disciples to go out into all the world and make disciples, so disciples did and still do that. In this matter, what are disciples, who makes them, how are they made, and how do disciples and their mentors qualify and match-up for discipleship and mentorship?

To answer those and perhaps other similar questions, let’s start with a definition of discipleship. A disciple of Jesus Christ is a believer who gives him/herself to another believer to be made/disciplined by that person into the likeness of Jesus. Discipleship is voluntary, which is good, because it is costly. It costs of the soul of the mentor and disciple. The mentor shows the disciple how to die to self and come alive to Jesus, and the disciple follows the mentor into that crosswalk.

The mentor takes the student disciple into his/her life as far as God’s grace in the disciple will bring the disciple. A key ingredient to their relationship is that the disciple is allowed to be “with” the mentor – Matt. 4:20, 22; 8:23; 9:9; Mark 1:18, 20; 2:14; Luke 5:11, 28. Being “with” mentors is essential for serious, measurable progress – Mark 3:14. Part-time disciples are part-time growing disciples, and Jesus had many of them. If you were on a deserted island, and desired to be a disciple of Jesus, He would do it one-on-one with you. But, off of that island there is little likelihood of one’s growing in discipleship without being mentored by another, more mature disciple called a mentor.

Making disciples is a command to disciples – Matt. 28:19-20. It is not a suggestion; it is not a request; it is not a plea. It is a command, which disciples hear as a command and as an opportunity to spread the kingdom and increase the harvest. So here is a question for you to answer to yourself: By what definition do you consider yourself to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Likewise, by what definition do you consider yourself to be a maker [mentor] of disciples? If you formulate you definition/answer from Jesus’ words, you are qualified.

One last point about discipleship, for the time being. There is a particular “breaking” of the will of the flesh when one becomes a disciple. Without that breaking, there will be more informing than transforming. And, the same quality will be passed on to the disciple. We produce only that which we are. If we are broken, we produce humble disciples. If we are not broken, we produce informed, self-willed, partial disciples.

1. There are many “gates” in life. Gates are entrances into something. My gates have been admission to Medical School, a marriage ceremony, membership in a gym, friends who introduced me to their friends, and so forth. Some gates were narrow, some wide. The most narrow gate was Jesus Christ. For years I was too big to enter His gate [Him], so I just could not enter. That did not bother me at the time because I enjoyed being BIG. More accurately, I was ignorant.

When I got a more accurate self-estimate of my size, I immediately stepped through the Gate and have been on the narrow road [mostly] since then. The smaller I see myself, the less narrow the narrow road seems. It is still narrow, but there has been less attraction to those beautiful alligators just beyond arm’s reach. The further I go along this narrow path, the more I enjoy those other little people who have gone this far with me.

1. The spiritual principal is true; we are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ – Rom. 6:11. Principles are basic truths that work, but only when we exercise them. That’s true in science and in spiritual matters. Exercising spiritual principles is done by knowing them [their truth and applicability] and believing them [acting on them while having faith in Jesus]. That’s why Jesus gave us instructions to take up our crosses daily and follow Him; the cross-walk “works.” It diminishes our mal-aligned flesh and brings forth the perfectly aligned life of Jesus in the believer. That truth makes us free – John 8:32. Over time, that which is true in principle becomes true in our experience. Sin loses its power and we show that we really are the righteousness of God – 2 Cor. 5:21.
2. There were patients in my medical practice who had illnesses they did not want diagnosed, especially if the diagnosis was “serious,” or if their illness developed from their highly preferred lifestyle. They wanted me to fix only the pain of their problem, which I knew would hardly be even a temporary solution to their needs. The church in America is approaching our illnesses in the same manner. Let’s think about it.

“Religion” in America has been changing during my lifetime, even during the last 50 years. Worshiping the Lord in spirit and in truth has not changed – John 4:23-24. Some believers are doing exactly that. The difference between worshiping in spirit and truth, and worshiping religion, is obvious during visits to “worship services.” The temporal, opposing effects of the two are equally obvious.

About 50 or so years ago in America the Methodists had 11 million members, and the U. S. population was 180 million. Now there are 7 million Methodists, while the U. S. population has doubled.

During the same time, the Presbyterians had 4.2 million members, and now have only 1.5 million. The Episcopal Church had 3.6 million, and now only 1.8 million. The Disciples of Christ fell from 1.9 million to 600,000. The Baptist Church, long a bastion of faith and truth, has been falling in numbers. The Catholic Church has also lost numbers, and numbers of ministers.

For all of the above-mentioned denominations, the problems are not the changes in our American culture, or any other outside influences; the opposite is the truth. The problem is within the church.

While and because of the increase of religiosity, the churches have lost their voice to their ambient cultures, and the ministers voices to their congregations. And they have lost their zeal for the Lord Himself. That shows in that we are not worshiping the Lord in spirit and truth. We don’t know our problem, and when we have it pointed out we dodge and weave as if it does not matter. Because the Father is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and truth, it matters.

There are those who are worshiping Him in spirit and truth. While others are not worshiped Him in that essential manner, the Charismatic and Pentecostal denominations are, and so have been growing rapidly. Their growth, even more marked in Third World nations, has increased their numbers to one-fourth of all the world’s Christians. That is remarkable, but remarkable only until one looks at the reason for the numbers [and dollars] differences.

Jesus said He would build His church, and that the gates of hell would not be able to stand against that which He would build. For the church to win that sort of battle we need to have the Planner [that’s Jesus], His Foreman [the Holy Spirit], His plans [His Word by the Spirit], His construction material [the especially-prepared who-so-ever-will ones], His equipment [His spiritual gifts and ministries], and His power [the Holy Spirit’s biblically-taught, promised power in little, receptive, hungry, nobody people]. Jesus said His disciples would need to be the least, and be as a child.

A little, nobody person is one who knows his/her flesh is nothing and has nothing good to offer God, so offers what he has – himself, entirely, the way he is. In return, the Lord begins making that person into a usable bit of material for His church, as long as he remains a little nobody. “Big” is the opposite of “little” [credit me with that clarification – ed.] Both are internal conditions, attitudes about one’s self, self-evaluations. Big is above God’s evaluation, and little is an agreement with the Lord about one’s self [one’s soul]. We may be rich, famous, and important [all of which is good] in God’s kingdom and in the world’s kingdom, but if it increases our self-evaluation we are still too big.

When the Lord does something for His little people, take caution. A bit of remarkable spiritual or religious success can lead to a change in the little nobody. The little person can take over God’s work. That which was of the spirit and truth is turned into a work of religious flesh. It has been estimated that in America the mainline Protestants have only 23 years left before their life, numbers, and money decline to such a low quality and quantity that they will be effectively absent.

The little people run to repentance when they see the writing on the wall. The big people will try harder when the Lord leaves, or simply give up and leave the field of battle. Such is the pattern of the church over the past half-century.

1. The Holy Spirit through King Solomon spoke of futility, weariness, and dissatisfaction with life when we in our self-focus have done and seen all that we want to do and see, and are still not satisfied. He summed it up by saying, “There is nothing new under the sun” – Eccl. 1:8-9. It appears that he was saying, “Isn’t there anything else new out there?! I’m tired of the same ole things, the same ole manna, the same ole gourmet food, the same old gold surroundings, the same ole 700 wives and 300 concubines.” He had the “same ole” disease. You already know that his and our ”same ole” problem is not “out there,” but “in here,” in our souls. When we are tired of this life, the problem is within us. The good news is that there is Good News. He is outside of us and is ready to be inside of us. His name is Jesus. Call on Him. He will work something out between the two of you.
2. The Israel Defense Forces, Israel Police, and other civil defense organizations and municipalities have held a four-day drill to prepare for what geologists call the inevitability of a massive earthquake that could strike Israel any day. Their statistics show that a massive earthquake strikes Israel every 100 years, so one is expected any day.

For us “watchers,” who keep an eye open to biblical and current events, that reminds us of two things: The first, Jesus said there would be widespread, great earthquakes as early warnings of His return – Matt. 24:7-8; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11. The experts tell us that nothing is new about earthquakes, but that they have increased significantly in recent years.

Secondly, during the Great Tribulation [which could start 3 or 4 years from now if the rapture is today] there will be several rounds of earthquakes [Rev. 8:5; 11:19], the last one to be so un-imaginable that Hollywood could not mimic it, if indeed Hollywood survives – Rev. 16:17-20. Jerusalem will split into 3 parts, the world’s cities will fall, islands of the seas will disappear, and mountains will be leveled.

Believers are not destined for that and the additional wrath from God that is to come upon the earth – 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9.

1. There are many things that are proofs of Jesus and His claims. The two proofs at the top of any list are, 1) the church’s unity [ouch!] as stated in John 17:23, which is designed to be our part of His overall proof, and 2) His resurrection [hurray!] as stated in Rom. 1:4, which is designed to be His part of His overall proof.
2. The Lord God is three persons in one. He is three individuals who are united into one being, not only three who are alike in nature, thought and action. The nature of perfection, holiness, love, righteousness, etc. of God is to want others to be like them and part of Him.

That describes human nature also, at least a taste of it, when we are at our best. For example, quality males and females want to come together and be one, then have children who are brought into oneness of family, so they do. God’s plan is to bring many humans to, then into, Him. That’s a large family of like and united individuals who will become one person with and in Him.

He hates sin so much that He will not tolerate it anywhere near Him, and certainly not within Him. Currently, all three of Him have the freedom to sin, so to be like Him we destined humans must have the freedom to sin but, through a divine process, eventually will not sin and will not have a nature that desires or is subject to sin. So, He set up an impossible scenario which is going perfectly according to plan. Remarkable!

1. Three justices of the Israeli Supreme Court have retired, only because they must retire at the age of 70. Their three replacements are outstanding by way of religion and ethnicity. Two are Arab Christians and one is an Orthodox Jew. That has a good spiritual feel, particularly as we see the world coming to a climatic convergence of many biblical prophecies.
2. There is a highly variable amount of our daily lives that is centered on us, then on others, then on the Lord. The social soup of life is not clearly divided in this matter, nor do I think it need be. We usually do “the thing that seems right” with personal preferences and sacrificial deference attached as the day flows.

In Luke 9:33 Peter decided that what he wanted was the best thing for the group to do, and attached “we” to his desire as if he had polled his two friends. He thought that what was good for him would be good for the Lord – a common opinion, is it not? But the truth is in the reverse – what is good for the Lord is good for us. That opens up the topic for questions like: 1) How will I know what the Lord wants [just ask Him], 2) Has the Lord already told me what He wants and how to do it [likely], 3) Perhaps the Lord’s choice will be painful to me in some way [possibly, but you have already counted the cost of following Him; get off the painful fence].

1. When I was a farm boy we did not say, “I have to go to work now.” Work was not a “have to do” matter. It was a normal matter, like breathing and eating. it was enjoyable, even if the weather was hot or cold, wet or dry. It was actually a privilege, because the healthy could work, and the results of our labors were almost always good. Work produced “wealth” in some form, which was also good. Work was how we made ourselves useful to others, so we were paid by those others – first by our family on the farm, then in our adult years by others.

Sometimes I think of the rewards in the hereafter received for working here in this earth-life for the Lord. But, usually, in the doing of His work is immediate reward. I still don’t have to do it, but it’s like breathing and eating, no matter some uncomfortable circumstances in His service.

1. Can a civil government as part of the kingdom of this world exist without corruption? No, even though civil governments do vary in their righteousness from good to bad. The more-free governments have less police-type oversight of itself, and the more totalitarian governments have much police-type oversight of itself. Yet, corruption seems to be more pervasive in the heavily policed governments.

I have some new information on more inbred corruption in the European Union, but it is not that much different from most other western nations. This time I’ll not put it into print. A good question is, “Is it possible to concentrate money and power without luring those entrusted into corruption?”

In some situations, an honest person can hardly function, because the flow of work is totally corrupted. A fine Christian brother who was the Secretary of Industry and Commerce in a Third World country would not deal in bribes, while all around him his countrymen did. It was a difficult situation because he was not trusted by the untrustworthy, and the untrustworthy controlled the direction, speed and flow of work. He remained faithful.

1. Moses married Zipporah, the Midianite daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian – Ex. 3:1. The Midianites were descendants of Abraham, and believed in the same one God, although they had been separated from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob [Israel], and Joseph for over 400 years. Moses had no problem with joining their family and worship.

Moses and Zipporah had children, including two men who became 2 of the 12 heads of the tribes of Israel. When the Lord called Moses to go back to Egypt to lead God’s people out of slavery, through the wilderness, and into the Promised Land, Zipporah went part of the way with Moses – Ex. 4:20.

At a rest stop they had a major disagreement that almost cost Moses his life – Ex. 4:24-26. The problem: God held Moses responsible for obeying Him, which at that point was to circumcise his sons into God’s covenant through Abraham. Zipporah had persuaded Moses to disobey God [recall Gen. 3:6], but when it was evident that Moses was about to die on account of his obeying his wife instead of obeying God, she stepped forward haughtily and circumcised the boys herself.

Moses “sent her away,” back to her father, with the boys – Ex. 18:2. That was an act of divorcement. Notice that that was before the Lord had given a law concerning divorce. Later, Jethro brought Zipporah and the 2 boys to Moses in the wilderness, and left the boys with him. Nothing is said of what happened to Zipporah thereafter.

Brothers, we are to love our wives, probably better than we have been loving them. Part of that love is to listen to them, but that does not include obeying them. Listing to our wives will keep us out of lots of trouble, but obeying them will bring only shallow and temporary peace. Obeying and submitting is their job to us, not ours to them. We are to obey the Lord in regards to being husbands. Adam messed up; Moses almost messed up.

Almost 10 years ago the Lord woke me up during the night and asked, “Do you love me more than you love your wife?” My immediate answer was about to be, “Why, yes, Lord; You know that I love you more than I love my wife!” But before I could answer, I hesitated. I asked myself, “Why did He ask me that question? He already knows the answer.” He was asking me that question for my sake. So, for 5 or 10 minutes I lay there in bed rehearsing the past 55 years of our marriage. I could see the truth, so I said, “Yes, Lord; I do love you more than I love my wife, although I have not done it perfectly.”

That was it. In the following months, I made some decisions in which I had to trust and obey the Lord. I would have made the same decisions even if Nancy had not agreed with me, but I did have the Lord’s recent reminder. However, she likewise recognized His will, so we trusted and obeyed, like two streams flowing together, forming one river.

1. When the Lord has spoken to you, and you know He has finished speaking, even though you wish He had told you more than the few words He used, go do what He said. In Genesis 12:1 the Lord said to Abraham, a worshiper of many gods, “Go forth from your country, ..” When the Lord finished speaking, the next verse says, “So Abram [Abraham] went forth as the Lord had spoken to him.” There were some things Abraham had to work out, and we don’t know how long it took him to do it, but the indication is that He didn’t argue or procrastinate. Luke 10:37.
2. Here are some cheer-ups for those who want Jesus’ life, victorious living, blessings, and the power to overcome sin. Go back to the cross of Jesus and punch the reset button. Note that you must decrease for Him to increase, so watch for opportunities to decrease the “me.” Accept trials from the Lord, despite His using good and bad people and temporal situations to bring them into your life. Gain by giving, of yourself and your stuff. Win by losing, not only to your kids, but to your friends and associates. You will notice that your joy will increase, even and especially in your trials, then you can boast in your weaknesses instead of [trying to] cover them up. Cross-bearing and self-denial are really good and effective stuff. The Lord says we can step right up and help ourselves to our heart’s delight.
3. A short primer: Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would be in them – John 14:17. Soon thereafter, as the resurrected Lord, He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” As He breathed the breath of God into them, they received Him into them. They were born again, of the Spirit. Later He told them to wait in Jerusalem until they received power from above, the “from above” anointing of the Holy Spirit which would come upon them. They waited and they received. Thus, they who had been first born again by virtue of God’s Spirit being placed within them, were then empowered by His Spirit having come upon them.

Jesus had told them that He was going to send them into the world just like He had been sent, not meaning they would first have to go to heaven and be sent from there, as He has come. He meant like He was sent into the world at His age of 30, when he was empowered by the “from above” anointing of the Holy Spirit. As He was sent, so He sent them – being sons of God and having God’s anointing. It was God’s plan. His sending and anointing have not changed.

1. In the war between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world, Jesus initiated the assault in the disguise of a suffering servant. His next personal approach will be a head-on military type attack. In the meantime, the church and the world have been going back and forth, with the church using both methods of attack – servant and military. Right now, the Western church is in retreat mode, bobbing and weaving, compromising and retreating. It is not surprising then that we lack spiritual life, because spiritual life requires zeal and sacrifice. We have little vision, method, or display other than that supplied by our individual brand of religiosity.

Evangelism has become a low-class term and practice, except it be done in a world-acceptable manner and under some other name. We are a secularized and self-centered bunch and lack the insight and humility to admit it. Instead, we either totally deny our condition or point to something else of true value. That’s like a patient brought to the doctor and denying that his bent right arm was broken, even pointing to his unbroken left arm as proof of his well-being.

If you see the situation, the Lord is probably sharing His insight with you and drawing you into His plan of action. Call it “salvation” or “revival” of the church because it involves deliverance from disaster and death exactly like He saved and revived us individually.

Your earnest prayers are good clues to having been recruited for the coming victory.

1. The following Thought is on Iniquity. It was prepared for our weekly Saturday Night Bible Study, to which you are invited.

Iniquity is lawlessness, generally meaning the habit of lawlessness or disobedience, not incidental lawlessness or disobedience. Judges 4:25 speaks of a time when God’s people lived in a time of iniquity. Iniquity can be shown by one’s ease of falling into habitual self-will. Iniquity can range from lying, to preaching the Gospel when the Lord has told you to stop, or going fishing when the Lord said start preaching, or talking longer than you should talk when you have been told to shorten your talk, or not talking when you have been told to talk. Iniquity is habitual lawlessness or disobedience, so need not involve only those sins more commonly recognized like cursing, stealing, lying, murder, sexual immorality, etc.

See Matthew 7:21-23. These verses are not about salvation [heaven vs. hell], but about: 1) Order [through humility and submission into unity] vs. iniquity. 2) Currently, the kingdom of God is the rule of God in our hearts and lives, and is shown by our doing God’s specific will for each of us. 3) “On that day” probably refers to the day of each Christian’s judgement at the Judgement Seat of Christ [like in Matt. 10:15; 2 Cor. 5:10]. 4) Calling Jesus “Lord” indicates they were Christians [1 Cor. 12:3]. 5) Their having done mighty miracles in His name indicates that they were Holy Spirit-empowered Christians – the kind Jesus wants. 6) “Never knew you” – see Mary and Adam & Eve where “knew” or “know” or “known” means having a quality of intimacy with someone so that he can reproduce His life in us; “His life” means developing Jesus’ personality and character, not simply the reception of His Spirit at our rebirth. 7) Depart to where? From the Lord’s presence, probably at the separation of overcomers from non-overcomers at the judgment seat of Christ and into the millennium. The overcomers will reign [and more] with Him, while non-overcomers will not – Rev. 2 & 3. Iniquity is the habit of lawlessness.

Yes, every sin is an act of iniquity. We all sin, thus we all commit iniquity. But we are convicted of our sin, repent, confess, and are forgiven and cleansed. On the other hand, to be trapped in iniquity and be blind to it is a tragedy that is well-described in those verses in Matthew 7:21-23.

Jesus came to form His body, made up of the redeemed, functioning under Him and relating to one another so to be functionally Him on earth – John 17:13-24; Eph. 4:11-16. To those who will yield themselves into Him that way, He gives the keys to His kingdom – Matt. 16:19 (13-20). It is not the anointing upon our ministry that approves or disapproves us before God, church and humanity, but our submission to God, church, and humanity.

Examples: The times when the Lord told Bob West and me to go, but we would not go if our going was not 100% “go” from all of the elders of our church. For powerful spiritual unity testimonies of this sort, see “God’s Doctor: A Texas Physician and the Miracles of God,” coming onto the market this July.

Who can be caught in iniquity?

1. Those not born again, of course. They are blind; especially the religious ones.
2. New or immature believers, perhaps due mostly to their ignorance if the church does not offer them discipleship.
3. Dedicated, staid, mature, church-leading believers.
4. “Praising the Lord” believers.
5. Anointed, ministering-by-the-Holy Spirit believers.

 Therefore, anyone [especially the ones who place themselves above the possibility] can be caught in iniquity. The devil will try to sidetrack the chosen anointed ones by using our spiritual success, obvious blessings, confident faith, and “perfect” theology.

But how can that happen!!? Answer: Deception, which is “firmly believing a lie to be the truth.”

Who among us are subject to deception and iniquity?

1. Preachers, pastors, priests, bishops.
2. Doctors, Bible teachers, mature Christians.
3. Lawyers, redeemed reprobates, the educated.
4. Mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, Sunday School teachers.
5. Redeemed ex-felons and ex-drug addicts, occasional backsliders.
6. Social workers, compassionate and sacrificial workers among the needy.
7. Church cheer-leaders, encouragers of spiritual excitement, those who always smile.
8. [Again: Those who do not think they are subject to deception and iniquity.]

The enemy of deception is the simplicity of Christ. The friend of deception is anything that would exalt “me” to the position of running “my life,” or thinking that I can and should run my life.

A good self-check is to recall your first thoughts at the beginning of this lesson about whether iniquity or deception had anything to do with you. If it was a humble shudder with, “Is that me, Lord?” you are probably clean. If it was a confident, “That’s not me!” you need help.

Another self-check is for those with “The Lord told me” syndrome. That syndrome does not have divine sanction until the person and the person’s words stand the test of submission to the Lord of and in the church – Acts 13:1-3; 15:22-29; 1 Cor. 14:32; Heb. 13:7, 17.

1. Allegories, similes, and types are often used in Scripture. They speak clearly to us while reducing the time, effort, paper and ink otherwise needed for a more full explanation. They can even enrich what the Lord wants to say. They are meaningful and accurate. Some examples: Jesus is now seated at the right hand of His Father, until His Father subdues all His enemies [“makes them His footstool”]. We have the Lord “on our mind.” The Lord has “softened our hearts.” We are “in Christ.” We “walk in the Spirit.” The Lord has “bowels of mercy.” We are “blind and deaf;” we “see and hear” spiritually. We have a “heart for God.” Using well-known word-substitutes is part of the Lord’s economy.
2. If we are seeking something in our walk with the Lord, we will likely have a difficult walk. If we are looking for Him, life along the way will make sense, making the difficult times not only endurable but productive and wholesome. That is to say, don’t look for improvement; look for Jesus. Don’t look for deliverance; look for Jesus the deliverer. Don’t look for healing; look for Jesus the healer. Don’t look for redemption; look for the Redeemer, Jesus. In other words, look for the Person, not for His works or His things. Desire them, but look for Jesus.
3. Why is it hard for a rich man to submit to the lordship of Christ Jesus – Mark 10:23-25? It’s not because he has riches. It’s because his riches have him. That can happen to a poor man, or to a man of moderate means. It can happen to me, and it has happened and does happen from time to time, so I know of the battle to keep the tempter out of my possessions-life.

You and I are alike, except in degrees. You have the same temptations. What are we battling against? Are we battling against having money and possessions [stuff]? Is personal righteousness and submission to the Lord easier if we are a street bum? Again, no; our problem is not our riches. Our problem is “me.” We cannot serve two masters. I must decide who is Lord or lord of my life. The righteous kingdom has only one King.

1. A middle aged, basically unchurched, thus not gospel-hardened, successful businessman who has recently started a life with the Lord Jesus has been receiving some anointed Bible teaching, and really receiving it. The most recent lessons had to do with acting upon that which he had been taught and believed. The focus of acting upon it was that he should respond in faith and action to the smallest nudges. He had never “heard” the Lord’s voice or been aware of actually following any specific leading of the Spirit.

He had a dream in which he was told to put sliced cucumbers on his recently-operated upon shoulder, for relief of pain. He and his wife did not like cucumbers so kept none in the house. However, they had recently had a house guest who had purchased some cucumbers and had left them in the refrigerator when she departed. Faithfully, he sliced some and applied them, per his dream, trusting that the Lord had thus instructed Him. His pain left.

The person who relayed this testimony to me, C. A., his Bible teacher and shepherd, and I agreed that his testimony was a copy of 2 Kings 5:10-14, John 2:5-10, and Genesis 12:1, 4. Just do as the Lord says, giving Him the benefit of any doubt. If we are not as little children, we will not find our way under the rule of King Jesus.

1. Of course, Scripture was breathed by God into the minds of men, and written so that we humans can believe in and understand Him. That’s nothing new, but at times I almost chuckle at the utter humanity of the Lord [for our sake] when He says things like, “I get up early in the morning to send My prophets on their duties” [Jer. 7:25] and “.. when God saw ..” [Jonah 3:10]. God doesn’t nap or sleep [Ps. 121:4], and He knows the end from the beginning [Is. 46:10]. How distant our finite minds are from the Infinite One’s mind, and how He works to get Life and Truth to us!
2. Passions don’t last; convictions do. On those precepts rest constitutional governments, which cannot change overnight, ordinarily taking 4 to 6 or more years to make significant changes. For example, in the United States the president is elected every 4 years. Senators are elected for 6 year terms, with 1/3 of them standing for reelection every 2 years. House of Representatives members stand for election every 2 years. And they have interlocking function, meaning they have checks and balances on one another.

The kingdom of God is not a constitutional government. It is a dictatorship. Its daily outworking and lower-level oversight is currently in the hands of its citizens. It works well only where it has not fallen too completely into the hands of its citizens. Currently [but this will change soon] the kingdom’s citizens are chosen, voluntary subjects whom the King is encouraging to live by faithful convictions in submission to their King. The soon change will be when He comes to Himself lead.

1. Human nature is above the nature of beasts but below God’ nature. Groups of humans, such as nations or religions or ethnic groups or sports enthusiasts or parents of teenagers vary from time to time from being much like God to being much like animals. Groan! Christian, does your personal life show nature-swings like that? The Spirit of Christ in you will fix that problem if you will accept His truth about you and will trust Him to accomplish it in you.

Hasta! Grow in humility and peacefulness. Avoid anarchy.