THOUGHTS OF FEBRUARY, 2015

1. Life is full of blessings; probably many more than we think to appreciate or pause to express our appreciation to God or man. It has been said that the more we express our appreciation, the more blessings we will receive. Those blessings come as smiles, words, corrections, funds, etc.

So this is personal to you: I appreciate you; you are a blessing. Your maturity and love flow freely. Being integrated with you in this healthy, functional part of Jesus’ body has been up-building from the beginning of our relationship. This is not your time to lay it down. May your shining light continue for many more years.

2. Humility is the ability to see ourselves as we are. It frees us to appreciate the accomplishments of others and to love them as we should. It removes self-promotion and self-seeking from our overt and hidden agendas. It enables us to exalt Jesus and Him alone [so watch those in worship because those who are humble are truly worshiping the Lord]. God’s standard for spirituality is humility.

3. A person’s countenance shows what is going on in his heart. As with Moses’ radiant face, the closer we get to the Lord and the longer we stay there the more our countenance reveals Him. Besides, the more time we spend with the Lord the more our choices become His choices for us. Even our feelings show the depth and time of our association with Him: “In His presence is fullness of joy.”

4. “Success is how far you bounce when you have hit bottom.” – General George S. Patton [1885-1945], U. S. Army.

Get up! Don’t lay there depressed and defeated, slouching about in despair. Yesterday’s was only one battle. Several defeats are often necessary before God grants the victory. Each of us has much “stuff” that must face loss before we are prepared for the consequences of victory. Moses lived high for 40 years, then in defeat and despair for 40 years, and then in victory for another 40 years. The Lord who led you downward still has you by the hand. He will lead you to your victory, even if it is at your last breath, if you don’t care which route He takes to get you there. Get up!

5. Lord Acton [1834-1902], English Catholic historian, politician and writer, wrote: “It was from America that the plain ideas that men ought to mind their own business, and that the nation is responsible to heaven for the acts of the state … burst forth like a conqueror upon the world … and the principle gained ground that a nation can never abandon its fate to an authority it cannot control.” Well said.

While that is true of human society, it is so very distant from anything of the kingdom of God. Citizens of the kingdom of God do often try to control our King, but He cannot be. We must abandon our fate to Him whom we and all others cannot control if we are to bounce [be lifted up] to success.

6. In the days of my early walk in the Spirit at Church of the Redeemer in Houston, Texas we started from “zero.” We first 5 men had been plucked up by the collar, given a new nature, and placed together into a new way of living – the kingdom of God. It cost us our everything. “Everything” meant all of the “me” in each of us -- our reputations, our relationships, and our possessions. In return, according to how well we paid that cost, we and those who joined us received abundantly from the Lord. We received an anointed Bible teacher, God’s wisdom, His voice regularly, grace for abandonment to Him, and provision and protection as needed. I say that we started from “zero,” meaning of spiritual experience, and biblical life. There was some traditional religious experience in our lives, as one of us was a clergyman, and two others were already involved in laymen’s type of church life.

My point here is that in many other places where spiritual renewal is desired, the situation is very different. In those places it is common that those involved, those who are desirous of the Holy Spirit’s renewal [for various righteous and not so righteous reasons], are very dedicated to their traditions and denominations. They have active churches, are functioning together adequately to achieve whatever vision they already have, and usually have noticeable and appreciable spiritual activity going on. It is very difficult for these saints to lay down all of ministry, reputation and possessions. They do not hear or heed the call to give up all they have and hope to have so that they can be bounced to spiritual success. They are tempted to allow the Lord of the church to only trim the bush, not put His axe to its root. As a result, they get little or nothing new and are left wondering why they got nothing when they, too, asked.

The only offering I have at that point is that if their hearts are right with the Lord, and they know and obey His ways, they will grow in faith. Without faith we [Christians] cannot please Him, and with faith we do please Him. With faith, and with God’s pleasure, things happen. It is His pleasure to give the kingdom to those people.

7. It is not possible to have enough police if the culture is lawless, out of control. Thus, our culture controls the number of, and use of force required by, our police department if it is to be at least reasonably successful. A shabby culture requires more and aggressive police. The same goes for the fire department, educational institutions, families, etc. The number and depth of our poor determines the cost of our welfare system. Our culture thus controls our tax rates, tourist trade, and much else. This upside down situation is incongruous. Cultures should be controlled by its leaders and carefully maintained over generations.

Example: The city of Chicago is now controlled by its blighted culture. It is a political, financial and moral mess. Corruption started coming in from the city’s leaders generations ago, filtered down, and is now widespread. It cannot be changed by new and bigger financial programs. It will require a moral leadership and generations of dedication to change. It may not happen.

On the other hand, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit would change Chicago in less than a year. Why not ask the Lord for your share of that burden?

8. Again, hardly a change of Thoughts here: When Gideon [Judges 6] was apprehended by the Lord he built an altar to the Lord [v. 24]. That equates to our hearts being made right with the Lord by His grace, leading us to offer our lives to Him as He moves on us continually. Notice verses 25-26 where the Lord did not allow Gideon to simply or privately have the blessing of a changed heart. He ordered Gideon to tear down his father’s altar on which lives were offered to Baal.

Lesson: Gideon had been raised offering himself to Baal. That was his heritage and habit – his tradition. When he had been made right with Jehovah it was necessary to tear down the old altar, not just be made right with Him. Our old commitments and patterns will plague us until we tear them down and get rid of them. Some of us must make the most of that process, others not so much.

9. If you have been wondering about the difference between a test and a temptation, here is help. A test is God’s viewpoint on the matter; a temptation is the devil’s viewpoint. If you perceive that you are having a test, you are doing well with it. If you are labeling it a temptation, you have identified an area of your weakness. Turn to the Lord in your temptation and it will turn to a test, then to a victory. Perhaps that will help the understanding of James 1:12-15.

10. “REVIVAL OR ELSE …” is a one-page presentation to a group of Christian leaders among whom the Holy Spirit is stirring. Enjoy.

It is contrary to God’s nature for Him to let spiritual decay persist among His people. He must act. In the Old Testament He sent His prophets with healing words and warnings. Sometimes His people heeded the prophets. If so, His words through them healed them – Psalm 107:17-20. At other times they did not change their ways, even after years of focused and intensified warnings. Death and destruction ensued. See Jeremiah 36:all for an example of Israel’s response to one of those offerings of life. It was similar to Israel’s later rejection of their Messiah – “burn the scroll” and “crucify Him.” It is now our time to respond to Him.

God and His word have not changed. He is still present with His people and still speaks through His word to heal us. After a time of working patiently by His Spirit, of sending us His word in an effort to heal us, He brings either revival or judgment. When we reject one we get the other. Will we change our hearts, minds, precepts, theologies, attitudes, etc.? Revival is necessary or we get judgment.

In the New Testament we are told that the things that happened to God’s people in the Old Testament happened to them and were recorded for our benefit – Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 10:11-12. Over and over those Old Testament saints were forced to deal with God’s offering of life [revival on His terms] or death [judgment on His terms]. The point: If the church does not turn to Him with our whole hearts and to His printed-in-our-language ways [the Bible], we the church and our ambient culture are in for more and varied trouble than we can imagine.

It’s not the world that needs to be changed, but the church – we who know Jesus Christ and profess to have accepted His work and ways for effect in our lives. Segments of the publicly recognized organization called the church have fallen into the hands of those who do not know Him and therefore cannot be expected to accept Him, His work, and His ways for effect in their lives. They cause problems in the church, but they are not of the church. They are present with us but are not part of us.

The church is a holy and spiritual organization. That means when the Lord’s eternal word is held up before us, we realize its authority over us and change accordingly as needed. Because that word is often held up in times of darkness, it is opposed by the simply uninformed, by the timid informed, and by its dedicated “authoritative” opponents.

Those who hold God’s word high in the darkness have pledged their heads to heaven, figuratively and literally. Revival is war. It may be exciting and pleasant in the hidden, small beginning, but soon becomes serious combat. There will be pressures that cause strain and possible division within; separation of formerly kind family, friends and others; all being from Christ Jesus as He shows Himself present and powerful, often at last moments.

His purpose for revival: To overthrow the status quo and establish the claims of His kingdom yet again.

Our choice: Live our commitment to Jesus, or live according to our fears.

[This is an evangelist’s approach to the church’s pressing need for repentance that leads to holiness and righteousness. As such, it presents with urgency the church’s need to know and act upon the truth. “My word is truth,” said Jesus. It may be compared, but definitely not contrasted, to the pastoral approach of true pastors. Evangelists stir faith and faithfulness; pastors gather and heal. The two are not opposites, but are two of the Lord’s five-fold ministries approach to Jesus’ own full ministry of the word of God. See Ephesians 4.]

11. Another life-giving Thought; this one on:

HAVING A HEART FOR GOD, AND KNOWING HIS WAYS – Hebrews 3:10

Or, Going Astray in Our Hearts, and Not Knowing His Ways

Summary: In Hebrews chapter 3 the Lord recorded His anger against His people [Israel]. In what is to me an astonishing revelation of Himself, He said He swore in His wrath that those over age 20 when He delivered them from slavery in Egypt [probably His “age of accountability” because that was also the age at which He said they could go to war] would not be allowed to enter His rest. They would not be allowed to enter the land that He had promised them – their Promised Land.

Note: We are told in the New Testament that the things that happened to Israel happened to them and were recorded for our sakes – Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11-12. The object of that topic in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 is stated in 3:12-13; 4:1, 11, that we also can receive that same chastisement from our Abba Father. As it was for those Israelites, for Christians the rest, the Sabbath rest, the Promised Land, abiding in Jesus, and entering into the fullness of God’s promises are also for our present earth-life. They are not for us when we get to heaven. They are offered now to all of God’s people.

Israel’s obvious problem, the one that stirred Jehovah to anger, was their unbelief/doubt. They had faith, but chose instead to base their life’s decisions on “after further due consideration” human understanding, that God-allowed commodity called “unbelief,” first recorded in the Garden, which was and is contrary to decisions based on the substance of faith. Their [as our] faith was based on God’s word, on their history with Him, and on His manifested continual presence with them. They had sufficient faith to live in His loving presence and to receive the fulfillment of His promises. Their “faith to live by” was a gift of God. It was adequate for every circumstance. He would make sure of that because He would customize and control every detail of their existence. However, if they desired, instead of living by the facts and substances of faith, they were free to choose doubt. Mankind from Adam onward has been free to believe or to doubt. There would be no spiritual robots.

Remember that Peter had faith to walk on water in response to Jesus’ invitation but, after further consideration of his natural circumstances, chose unbelief. Faith, belief, and unbelief are separate commodities; we have each. Faith is God’s gift of the knowledge of His truth and is imparted to us; we cannot work it up but we can stir up the desire to believe. Belief is our decision to act upon His truth. Unbelief/doubt is our decision to not act upon His truth. Jesus said, “O, you of little faith, why did you doubt?” Peter’s faith told him that if Jesus called him to walk on the water with Him, he could do it. Reconsideration of his natural circumstances created enough unbelief to change his mind; to convince him that walking on water was impossible. He set aside faith, entertained doubt, and decided on unbelief.

Our faith is increased and our unbelief more easily thereafter rejected when we have chosen to obey the Lord and have experienced His results. Good stuff abounds in us when we see His hand working in response to our obedient decisions. His all-mightiness increases our trust, confidence, faith, belief and thus our willingness to obey Him even more.

Now to our advertised dual topic, which is having a heart for God and knowing His ways. Those are two main areas of either stumbling or victory and are revealed in Hebrews 3:10 as 1) hearts that are not fixed on the Lord, and 2) not knowing His ways.

I want to approach that situation from four directions. Each human is in one of the following groups, and we may change groups:

1. Those who have neither a heart for God nor know His ways. That is the natural state of humanity, the condition of non-Christians and of the non-Christianized world.

2. Those who know God’s ways but do not have a heart for Him. Those in this group are: a) Christians who have decided to not be the Lord’s disciples, having received new life and perhaps having been delivered from bondages, but having no desire to submit their lives to Him. b) Those non-Christians who are Christianized due to being born into Christian families or Christian cultures, and have accepted to some degree their ambient Christian standards. It appears that this will be the predominant group during the Millennium in the natural human population of that time. During the Millennium they will conform to enforced and rewarded righteous behavior, but as soon as the devil is released to re-enter the world and resume his evil work, they will follow him into worldwide rebellion – for a short time – Rev. 20:7-10.

3. Those who have a heart for God but do not know His ways. If their condition persists, they remain lawless [uncontrolled and un-self-controlled] and become spiritual wrecks – loose cannons. Jesus addressed their condition in Matthew 7:21-23 when He called them lawless [workers of iniquity]. They did not do His Father’s will even though they thought they had. Their problem was that they did not know God’s ways. They called Jesus “Lord” and did many Holy Spirit anointed things in His name, but they did not get credit for them before God. Why? Because they had done those things in their own will. For Jesus to hold them responsible for knowing His ways, the knowledge of His ways would have had to have been available to them.

To this group who have a heart for God but do not know much of His ways we must honor those saints present mostly in the Third World among dangerous religious groups, who do not have access to Bibles or Seminaries or Christian teachers, yet who give to others all of their knowledge of their precious Jesus, often at great personal cost.

4. Those who have a heart for God and know His ways. This is the happy condition offered to everyone who had heard the gospel and responded to its message.

I am still struck almost speechless by the depth of God’s anger at those saints who did not and do not have a heart for Him and not know His ways. What if they did not know their condition? What if we do not know?

All of this Thought has to do with our being both good quality and available material for the Lord as He builds His house. He is the builder; He has sub-contractors also, and all believers are His material. Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 are entirely about believers [the called ones] becoming good and available material [the chosen ones]. See Matthew 22:1-14 for some words from Jesus about us. Remember, too, that Moses asked to know God’s ways – Exodus 33:13, so He was shown/taught those ways. Moses could not have been God’s sub-contractor if he had not desired to know and been taught the Architect’s way/plans.

David had a heart for the Lord, but he knew he also needed to know God’s ways – Psalm 25. Our all-volunteer military have a heart for our nation, but they also need to know the ways of the military. No wonder the Lord was so angry at Israel that He would not allow them to go into the Promised Land! If He had permitted them to go into battle against many and stronger nations while they did not have a heart for Him and did not know His ways, defeat and destruction would have resulted. His people would have been no people, and He would have been of no reputation.

All Christians are called to the construction site but many are not chosen by the Builder. The difference is whether we are good material and are available to Him. Having a heart for Him and knowing His ways prepare us for our place in His building.

Possibly as an ending to this multiple thought Thought: Could it be that the reason we are possibly lacking Jesus’ glorious church, the one He will be coming back for [Eph. 5:27], is because we [possibly mostly those who are His shepherds] do not love Him with our whole hearts and have chosen our own ways; that we do not have a heart for God and do not know His ways?

12. A few days ago, I observed indisputable basic differences between the males and females of our species, other than the obvious physical. We were in an impromptu social group of people, all who were waiting for our cars to be repaired. That allowed for the development of not only a social group but an order to develop within the group and certain interplays of personalities. There were 12 of us. Two were a mother and her three year old son, and two others were a mother with her three year old daughter. Those two kids were well-mannered and peaceful. That which went on between them was enough to defeat all unisex ideas ever advanced.

The girl appeared to be fully occupied with her girl toy and mother, but the boy had his eye on the girl. Over time he often checked on her, silently making whatever observations three year old boys make about three year old girls. He did that from a safe distance across the room. He watched her more than he played with his little tractor. She appeared to be totally unaware of him. [Of course, we know she wasn’t.]

Slowly he played with his tractor a bit closer to her, and a bit more closer. Finally, he offered her his tractor. At first she declined his offer, but he gently persisted and finally she accepted it. As soon as she accepted that which he had offered, he showed his true intent – he took what she had and began enjoying it. Soon, for no apparent reason [but definitely a female trait] she started running around the room. You guessed it; he chased her [his as yet only three year old male trait being tuned up].

When she returned to her mother, who had been brushing her hair, he picked up the brush and brushed her hair. [He had been accepted as family.] She displayed her delight. At that point his mother commented that all he did with his sister at home was pull her hair! [Ah, but this was not his sister’s hair! Right, guys?] His mother also said that at home he never let his sister play with his tractor. [Very understandable.]

Then the girl offered him a bite of her chocolate chip cookie, which he accepted. He chewed it and swallowed it, but you should have seen the look on his face the whole time the cookie was in his mouth! It was as if it was the worst tasting piece of slop possible -- but he ate it and without comment. [He has the makings of a great husband.] That’s when his mother said he hates chocolate chip cookies and never eats any. But he ate that bite!

That little observation is loaded with truths about distinctive male and female natures, some of which I have inserted in brackets. You imagine the remainder.

13. Thomas Jefferson [1743-1846], one of America’s founding fathers, spoke of religious freedom in regards to the place of civil government in our personal lives. He said: “The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.” Since then we have seen the growth of government and the diminishment of freedom. The nature of government is to break its restraints and to gather power to itself.

14. Sometimes repentance lasts only as long as we are actively dissatisfied with ourselves over a performance. That presents us with a problem! Not that we should drag out our forgiven sins and their associated guiltiness, but we should take time to reflect on how we got into that problem in the first place. Our sinnings indicate to us that we are attracted to certain sins and don’t actually innocently “fall into” them – James 1:14. We are “open” to them; actually “awaiting” and on the alert for those opportunities. That sounds terrible, doesn’t it! Yes, and it applies to our impatience, self-centeredness, slothfulness, etc. [You can name some of yours.] Thus, our post-sinnings times of repentance plus some reflection can present us with solutions to our problems. That’s “scheduled preventive maintenance” to you handymen, and “preventive care” to you moms and other health care professionals.

15. From the beginning of my walk with the Lord, I have been impressed with the wonder and power of peace, even if it is an enforced peace. An environment of peace is the foundation for healing of the shredded or oppressed soul. Nancy and I promoted peacefulness in our home by such little but instrumental household rules as not raising our voices to speak to someone in another room, keeping radio and television volumes down, and developing habits that avoided situations that led to anxiety and disorder. Those are examples of some simple things we can do to develop and maintain peace. They are often the outworking and implementation of our faithwalks. Without God’s grace toward us, our faith toward Him, and our love for one another, simple rules can be dry and nonproductive, or worse.

But, the power of our rules, God’s grace, our faith and our love began on the cross where the Prince of Peace paid for [bought] peace with God for me and for you if you, too, have trusted Jesus by exchanging your life for His. That deal was complete and final – completely efficacious. Thereafter, God has not needed any reminders of His peace treaty with us, no matter how poorly we have performed.

But, that’s not the end of the matter. Jesus is now in heaven maintaining that peace. As said, He does not now need to maintain that peace between God and us, only in us. He is working on our behalf so that we may gain all of the benefit possible from already being at peace with God. Living in and showing forth that peace is a Family privilege. We are now sons of God, brothers with the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, who has all the peace we could ever want or need. We are abiders in the household of God where there is no shouting, no anxiety, no fear and no tardiness – only peace and orderliness. Even Satan, when on occasion he is bidden to step back into that heavenly home, must abide in peace.

That’s good news.

16. What did Jesus mean when He told us to take up our crosses daily and follow Him? Short answer: All day, every day, our path will lead us to death, some of which times we will be convinced that God has turned a deaf ear to our prayers and his back to us. Our prayers and efforts for personal righteousness will be unanswered; our prayers for others will be unanswered; and our lives will seem hollow and meaningless. That is the prime experience of our cross-walks. He was and is calling us to walk His way and to achieve His same results. Read Acts 4.

Imagine the payoff. Many are called and few are chosen.

17. This Thought is a necessary follow-up to the previous one. We have all heard Jesus’ “Many are called and few are chosen” quotation applied to salvation – heaven vs. hell. I think that is not the correct application.

Think of a craftsman who is building a house, like Jesus is building His house. The craftsman, such as a carpenter, goes to the pile of lumber that has been bought, looking for a particularly good, strong and straight board. He looks at several and picks the one perfectly fitted for his prime need. Those not chosen are not burned up, but are rejected for that prime purpose. This allegory is not about heaven vs. hell, but about prime usefulness vs. inferior usefulness. Jesus is building His church. All Christians have been bought and delivered [called] to the job site where the Builder is at work. He chooses those who are available and qualified. All will be used, but some to higher purposes.

18. If someone asked if Christianity, sound economics and liberty are compatible, what would be your answer? My answer would be, “Yes, and for a free society they must function as a three-legged stool.”