THOUGHTS OF AUGUST, 2020

1. In Luke 7:27 Jesus identified John the Baptist as the one who Malachi had prophesied would come before Jesus to prepare Jesus’ way. How did Jesus know that? Was He taught that by His parents, or in the synagogue? Did He bring that bit of knowledge down to Earth with Him from heaven? No, to all of those possibilities. That information was given Him from above through revelation, which enabled Him [and enables us] to piece together natural observation and biblical knowledge by using faithful, spiritual-mindedness.
2. What can the Lord do when He has a message for His people? He can, a) spread the news Himself, b) tell it to someone(s) who will spread the news for Him, or c) remain silent, which is not like the Lord, although He has gone silent many times for various reasons. Let’s go over those three possibilities:
3. He can spread the news Himself. Some of His people do listen to Him personally, they stay in communication with the Lord, so they get much of His leadership directly from the Lord Himself. That blesses the Lord and is rewarding to multitudes of believers for whom hearing the Lord for themselves is vital. The Lord does speak and can fix our spiritual ears [meaning our hearts and minds] to hear Him speak, and when we hear we recognize His voice, rejoice, and live accordingly. The dangerous part is that there are deceiving spirits, and one’s personal desires can confuse our hearing. So, two or more should hear together, testing the voices, at least about the more important things.
4. He can tell the news to committed and experienced listeners and leaders who will spread the news for Him. Believers who are living members in well-formed Bodies of Christ will listen to their recognized messengers, the messengers being God’s chosen, trained and recognized apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, and will receive the Lord’s message from these humble, known and trusted ministers. A difficulty here can be that many Christians are not part of a cohesive, living Body of Christ, so often reserve for themselves the hearing or declining of God’s word, not trusting their leaders, or not having trustworthy leaders.
5. He can remain silent, or at least the multitudes will not have the faintest idea that He has spoken. In scripture, some of those folks heard something like thunder when God spoke; most heard nothing.

The Lord’s responsibility seems to end when His message has gone forth adequately, meaning adequately for those who will listen. The listeners have spiritually opened ears and softened hearts.

You may recall that all of the Israelites heard God give the Ten Commandments to Moses, but thereafter they asked Moses himself to hear from God alone, then speak to them after he heard from God. They did not want to hear God speak directly to them because they were afraid of Him, not knowing Him as a warm, loving God. Hearing God’s word through Moses also gave them the cushion of believing or not believing Moses their intermediary, whereas hearing from God directly would have put their flesh in the hard place of having to obey or disobey God. That almost unbelievable request from God’s people can be read in Deuteronomy 5. We find ourselves in the same situation.

So, there are times when the Lord will raise His voice, blow the trumpet, send His prophets [who may be martyred physically or reputationally], and do remarkable things to get His peoples’ attention, trying to get them to hear and do what is needed. It seems like the louder and longer He must speak in order to get the attention of His people, the less enduring response He gets from His people. Those are times when action is needed now or major disasters happen. We are in such a time. Have you heard the message?

A note about the “now!” Remember that Israel was actively anticipating the Messiah for years, especially for the 400 years immediately preceding His arrival as Baby Jesus in Bethlehem. During those long years, silent of prophetic voice, faithful wives prayed that they would be the one to give birth to the Messiah. That was also 400 years of broad efforts of faithfulness, during which Israel had military rebellions against Rome, a few years of national independence, and again defeat. Trying to bring in the Messiah did not work for them; nor would it work for us.

Israel also had a deep religious expectancy of Messiah’s coming, beginning with the temple priesthood. Expectance of the Messiah was significant in all Israel for hundreds of years, and that is my point to us. We are clearly in a “now” time of Jesus’ coming for the church and, as before Jesus came to Israel, there is no excuse for our not being ready. Question: What is “being ready?” What should the ready church be like? We will consider those questions later.

Social signs of the Lord’s soon coming can be listed as:

1. Apostasy of the church, upon which society depends. Church apostasy means the loss of our biblical foundations. It is amazing how God’s people can lose our biblicality and not know it. In Jesus’ day religious leaders had the scriptures memorized, knowing that much of it concerned their coming Messiah, but they did not recognize their Messiah when He walked among them, talked with them, quoted the scriptures about Himself, did miraculous Messiah-confirming things before their eyes, and died at their hands according to their own memorized prophetic scriptures. Today, religious leaders and congregations read the scriptures too, but likewise do not believe, at least not the kind of belief that is Messiah accepting. Sinful disobedience in the church is approximate to the unchurched. Bible reading in services is common, but Bible studies are not; that is telling.

1. Widespread anarchy against all social institutions, meaning “dismantle the systems.” That means the loss of society’s unity and direction. The year 2020 will be recorded as the beginning of local governmental failure at all levels around the world, even in America.
2. Formation of regional and one world governments. That means the loss of federal, state and local control of governments; no more government of, by, and for the people.
3. Thought and language control. That means the loss of personal and religious freedoms – meaning of all freedoms. Government will be by deception and force, meaning captured, enslaved.

During that mess [think: “we are now in it”] the Lord will be very quietly pouring out His Spirit on the faithful churched, forming His glorious church [without the necessity of one recognized organizational structure], for whom He is soon coming. It will be a church that has listened to Him and responded to Him, that He will have cleansed by what He has said to us, that will have no spot or wrinkle or any other blemish, and that will be holy and blameless before him – Eph. 5:26-27. [Stop now. Take time to read those two verses. It’s about us.]

Lately I have been teaching about the reality of local Bodies of Christ, that they are like Jesus, like Jesus as is found in Acts chapters 2, 3 and 4. The Lord has done that many, many times in these 2,000 years of the church, and He is not through yet. We are now seeing a worldwide revival of Jesus. He is breaking forth in some areas, is being prayed for in others, and is peeking through baby-spiritual eyes in others. As always, He is being ignored in other areas, especially in the religious areas, as He was when He came 2,000 years ago. Don’t expect to see reports of spiritual renewal on the evening news, or even in the religious news, and as of more recently not even on the social media. Christian spirituality makes nonspiritual people “uncomfortable,” so these days it is either censored or labeled “not news.” Expect more of the same.

However, the Lord is seeing to the delivery of His message. He has His five-fold ministry, which is His official delivery service. So that does require that we subscribe to His service. Jesus told us that there would be false messengers, some even masquerading as Jesus Himself, and He gave us the responsibility of recognizing them. True spirituality and vital unity in a local Body of Christ is essential, helping us to fix our eyes on Who, what and things that do not move.

The Lord does not leave those, who have eyes and ears, without light and instruction. He does what is necessary so we do not wander in the dark, being left to do what is right in our own eyes. But, contrary to our usual desires, we should not seek to be delivered from the miseries that surround us, but stand strong in the storm, as the One who controls storms, and all else, will never forsake us nor leave us to our own devices in this fight.

When the Lord says or does something, and we recognize, appreciate and appropriate it, spiritual growth results. When it is refused or not believed, blindness and deafness result. Those negative results can go so far as to produce a hardened heart. Negative results come from holding to a lie and rejecting the truth. Resistance turns us against the Lord, or against something of Him, resulting in unforgiveness, lack of Holy Spirit anointing, or some particular disobediences. The point is that our attitudes are important and we are responsible for them, no matter how they were originally caused or why they were accepted by us. Much prayer and repentance are required in order to be released from spiritual blindness and deafness.

Few understand the seriousness of the situation we face. Most appear to want to avoid the truth, and to avoid talking about the truth, in its fuller dimension, especially as it applies to life changes. Perhaps that stalemate must be handled by someone else in the Body, which would again show our need for the Lord’s five-fold ministry. The nature of our flesh is that we want to just carry on as per our current standards while also accumulating as many new blessings as may be available. As said the prophet Haggai, God’s people were more involved working on their own houses than on His house [the living Body of Christ].

There are responses to make to the Lord internally, some are small blessings, some vital. The question remains, what am “I” being called to in today’s context? Those who had God’s grace to go out to the Jordan River to hear John’s message were stymied by what they were to do next, due to John’s refusal to grant them his religious ministry of water baptism without their making specific life-changes. While it is true that their and our sanctification is the Lord’s business, so is everything the Lord’s business. But there is a mystical balance; there are decisions and choices for us to make, as said John and Jesus to those who at that point had only listened, not acted. What is there for us to do, considering that the Lord may come for us this afternoon, or in 400 years?

1. Does the evidence of your trust, forgiveness, gentleness and patience of others convince them of the certainty of God’s similar character? Trying to answer that question is a challenge isn’t it, and a big chaw question if approached honestly. But I have known some very gracious believers for whom I would answer for them, “Yes.” You have made life a blessing. Thank you.
2. If you want to read only a few Bible verses and get blessed, read John 3:18, John 5:24, and 1 John 2:12. What a comfort! They say that our sins have been forgiven, and that the next time we see the Lord [probably meaning at Christ’s judgment seat] the topic will be our righteousnesses, not our unrighteousnesses. Our sins are washed away by Jesus’ blood, leaving our time at the judgment seat to be concerned only with our righteousnesses for determination of our rewards.

The point is made elsewhere that some of us will be surprised when we do not get expected rewards, because our labors turned out to be wood, hay and stubble [stuff to be burned up] instead of gold, silver and precious jewels [rewardable stuff]. The definition of rewardable stuff is that which the Holy Spirit did in and through us during our earth life. That throws out much of our self-effort and self-decided good works.

Our sins have been forgiven, so why not sin freely? To quote Paul, “God forbid!” or “May it never be!” We have been hand-picked by the Lord, and have yielded ourselves to Him as slaves for the simple purpose of our becoming obedient to Him His way. Now our obedience is from the great desire of our hearts, having been freed from sin in order to present ourselves [bodies and souls] in righteousness to the Lord for Him to clean up our acts [sanctification] so our lives show His power and ability to do His good work within us. Read Romans 6:15-19 and get it straight from the Holy Spirit through your Bible.

1. As I have said before, and others are saying, the Lord is coming very soon. It may be today, or in 400 years, but He is coming very soon. There is a song that goes, “I’m not looking for a hole in the ground, I’m looking for a hole in the sky. Jesus is coming bye and bye. It may be night or noon, but He’s coming very soon, and He ain’t gonna catch me lying down. No, He ain’t gonna catch me lying down.” The Lord’s coming has the same time-perspective problem as a mother faces when her child is impatiently awaiting the cake coming out of the oven, and the same is God’s perspective as He sits in the eternal heavenlies dealing with us who are locked in our human time-frames.

That godly expectancy leaves us with the common question: What to do until He comes, whenever that may be? Jesus warned us of things to not do, such as not to follow after false Messiahs, and not to set dates for His coming for us, but we are to be aware of the season of His return, to be alert and ready.

Be at peace about His coming. It is the Holy Spirit’s assignment to reveal things about what is to come. In John 16:13 Jesus said, John heard, and the Holy Spirit reminded John to write, “.. when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”

So, how should disciples occupy ourselves until His return? Well, Jesus did not hear when He would return because His Father did not tell Him, and the Holy Spirit has not heard when Jesus will return because the Father has not told Him [or He would have told us], and we do not know when Jesus will return because our Father will not tell us. Conclusion: If Jesus and the Holy Spirit and the holy angels do not need to know and should not know, we also do not need to know and should not know.

So, we are at peace not knowing when Jesus will return. In our peace, and expecting Him at any time, what sort of things should occupy us [more accurately, “how should we occupy ourselves”] in regards to His coming? Our answer depends on our revelation of “church,” what it can and perhaps now should be, our personal experience with the reality of biblical church, and our desire for the best of the Lord’s offering. It is a tragedy that we do not know what that church is like. It’s like Jesus.

I have described five different directions of actions for us, without recommendations:

1. Don’t change how we are. Stay the course. We are like we are by God’s grace and we can continue as we are by His grace. Our denominational groups are not so bad; each having evolved from genuine Holy Spirit revivals which were meant for sustaining the church until the Lord comes for us, or until the next outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The problem here is that each new outpouring has been opposed by the established churches of the previous outpourings, indicating that a gospel hardening and spiritual darkness sets in from one outpouring to the next – a routine occurrence among God’s people of both Old and New Testaments.
2. Stay where you are. Pursue obviously needed changes as indicated by scripture and by other basic and brotherly denominations and non-denominations. Fast and pray. Gather together and seek the Holy Spirit’s leading and power for change. Watch and pray. Study scripture’s instructions for improving life and worship. For those who are willing to hear their weaknesses, pray with and counsel them about spiritual leadership, church apostasy, and subtle unbelief. Work with them for improvement. The problem here is the resistance of the established leadership, passivity of membership, lack of united vision, and general susceptibility to unrighteous judgment and separation.

3) Stay where you are. Form prayer and Bible study groups in which real faith and life can be nourished, family reality established, ministries developed, and personal growth promoted and overseen.   
As para-church groups, these small groups can strengthen our traditional churches. The problem here is that small groups tend to become the real experience of Christian life for their members, which weakens those members’ ties to traditional churches, they having found Body of Christ reality in their small groups. And, church leaders can be reluctant to allow strong groups to develop within their flocks, due to threats to their direct leadership and control.

4) Don’t stay where you are. Form a new, alive Body of Christ and commit only to it. Where two or more disciples are gathered together in Jesus’ name He is there with us. Seek to lay down our lives together and to live as Christ, as is shown in Acts chapters 2, 3 and 4. Look for the way of Christ, the way of the cross, the ministry of Christ among us. The problem [really, “a blessing”] here is that you will appear to be nobodies for several years as you learn to love and trust one another, becoming united and interdependent. In due time, spiritual powers begin to be granted, and outreach ministries blossom.

1. Of course, it may be that there is already a vital local Body of Christ near you, or far away that you could move to, one that is not simply marking time, but is biblically sound, producing disciples, and displaying spiritual life and gifts in congregational life and worship. The problem here is that you may not find such a congregation, or that there be one but it not be to your personal liking, and you miss seeing it as God’s provision.

In Luke 19:13 [read 11-27] we have a good picture of what it means to occupy until the Lord returns. And, in Luke 21:13, Jesus said that these present and nearby times “.. will lead to an opportunity for your testimony.” The accent is that we should “do business,” not “just hang on.” Invest ourselves with intent to increase the Lord’s kingdom. That means both sexes, all ages, all walks of life, all the time, everywhere – not just the preachers.

Remember that it is the five-fold ministry that equips the saints to do the ministry. Find them. Ephesians 4:12 says that ministry is “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” As committed Christians, our religion and its beliefs and testimonies are indeed personal but not private. We are to serve Jesus, testify of Him, give ourselves for Him, equip the saints, encourage one another, and be free-flowing good news people.

The alternatives are many and varied. No single means of occupying until He comes is meant for all. But there is spiritual fruit to be produced wherever we are, and will be borne if we abide in the Lord and seek Him with all our might. There will be revival. What is your assignment?

1. Congratulations, because you are constantly challenging the enemy’s lies, and winning. Part of your success is because you have developed a Christ attitude, and part is because you are still working on that commitment. You are proving the ability and faithfulness of the Lord while you are still right here in your human flesh. You are rejecting one deception after another, coming out of darkness as you walk in fellowship with Jesus. You are an overcomer. You know the truth and are holding to it. You have heavenly hearing and heavenly vision. Your mind and heart are fixed on the Lord. Because you are no longer deceived, you are no longer controlled by the devil [but you remember when you were]. Stay on the narrow trail.
2. There has been considerable thought over the centuries that there is an unsolvable difference between God selecting those to be saved and the free-will of humanity of those being saved, or not. Both are taught openly in scripture, so there must not be an unsolvable difference once we have our understandings adequately aligned with the Lord. God can choose those to whom He will reveal Himself because He sees the heart of every person. He searches hearts, finding those who will respond to His offer of Himself, offers Himself to us, and we say, “Yes.” There are various ways to say, “Yes,” but it is our free will that expresses it, and He is not surprised to get our, “Yes.” The entire process is well-oiled with grace, love and wisdom.
3. I want to share something with you. first, please read Psalm 19:7-12, with accent on verse 12. That verse speaks of hidden faults, and in it David asks the Lord to graciously deal with his unknown or hidden sins, since he [David] cannot. My sharing is of the Lord doing exactly that with me over the past couple of months. My intent is not to dump my sins into your lap, not to share navel-gazing and secret nose picking stuff with you, but to point out the blessings of cooperating with the Lord when it’s His clean-up time. Here we go.

Some things have been going on in the outskirts of my mind for years. You might ask, “What kept them in the outskirts?” Answer: A combination of pleasant, successful busyness and semi-intentional neglect, almost so that I did not know they were there. When, after April 15 [2020], my life was changed, it was necessary for me to rearrange my life, including much of my day-by-day thinking, both immediate and probably long-term. This is the first time in my 90 years that I have lived alone, and it has the ring of permanency.

I’m not lonely [an ordinarily wasteful and negative mood which most of us understand from our own experience], but I am “alone” [a fact and sensation such as being dropped into the Alaskan wilderness hundreds of miles from another human]. My aloneness is despite the presence of and fellowship with the Lord, attentive family, loving friends, incidental others, and my occasional trips to the grocery store.

There is a strangeness to this aloneness because from the beginning it has been a positive thing, not at all negative. Many have lost long-married spouses, but for me it is an unknown simply due to it being my new personal inexperience. It took me a month or so to understand that my peaceful aloneness was from the Lord, a real gift, and that His purpose and grace came with it. That was comforting.

I checked with a devout, mature Christian who is a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, psychoanalyst, and has been a close friend for about 45 years. I described my aloneness without loneliness. My question was simply, “What do you think about my mental-emotional-spiritual state?” After due consideration his opinion was that it was normal. I can tell you; it was good to get that report.

As I talked with the Lord about my new and strange aloneness, those things that had been “going on in the outskirts of my mind for years” began to come into focus. I began to realize that the aloneness of my life helped them come clearly, and I could see purpose in the process. They were negative things about my character and behavior and track record of life. The main one [so far] was that I have been more blessed with God’s and others’ forgiveness of my sins than I was with the wonder of His and their love for me in suffering through my sins and giving me their forgiveness. Again; I have been more blessed with the wonder of getting out from under the load of sin, than I have been for the unimaginable grace and love and long suffering of the forgivers, and for the expensiveness to them of their forgiveness.

That bittersweet revelation included things and attitudes from my childhood until the present. During this few weeks process I have been peaceful, with a healthy amount of soft sadness. These are sins and inadequacies of which I had already repented, and I knew they had been already been washed away forever in the blood of Jesus, off of the books permanently. But I cooperated with the Holy Teacher as He showed me more of Him and me, and of our relationship. I want to share a bit more of it with you.

By the way, this old dog is still learning a few things, and I am changing, becoming a more peaceful, honest and possibly a more graceful person.

I have received lots of God’s grace over these years, enough to tell you that it seems to flow more abundantly in the dark times than in the light. And it was in the dark days of Nancy’s last few months and weeks of earth life, that I was faced with the absolute inadequacy of anything I could do to prevent her death, to keep her with me for another 70 or 700 years. She and the Lord wanted her in heaven, but there was enough in me that wanted her here with me, and I lost. That showed a shallowness and self-centeredness of my love for her, at the time of the obvious perfection of His timing for her promotion. As I said, it was not easy for me to come to total agreement on that.

To the end she was patient and forgiving, and eager to go be with Jesus, her long-time Friend and Savior. The path the Lord had me on was to show me that He loves little people [I have known that, but at times did not really consider myself very little], and that He loves sinful little people [I was weak on that, too]. The point coming out of that is that I don’t have to think consistently of myself as a little person and of an imperfect little person before He loves me – He loves me in my sin, in my counterfeit bigness, in my unforgiven condition, always. He saw me that way and loved me before I believed in Him, and when I drifted off the narrow trail to do my own thing, and He still chose me and has stayed with me, and will stay with me. I have had that theology correct for years, but have not always been as deeply grasped by it.

Of course, He doesn’t want me to stay how I am, so He has been loving me into the light so I can “see” His grace, like Jacob wrestling with the Lord until dawn. I need to grab that, live in it, and pass it on to others [that’s you]. I certainly do love the righteous ones, but at times my showing it has been a bit thin for those who fell into unrighteousness, like I have done. That has to go, first in me for my sake, then in me for your sake, so I can love you as myself for Jesus’ sake.

Also, I want to remind us to stop worrying, because all our sins are forgiven, and if we are unfaithful, the Lord remains faithful. Yes, I know that I’m not talking to bank robbers or murderers or blasphemers, but I am talking to all of us who do those things in penny-ante ways – like not giving to those to whom we should, at least not being sacrificially generous with our lives, not forgiving those who irritate or otherwise violate us, and not being entirely truthful in order to avoid dealing with the truth.

And, I had been tending toward not seeing myself as a sinner, at least not as a bad sinner, not like that worse-than-me sinner “next door.” Ugh! When I slide into that stuff, I feel like the Lord is wasting His love and time on me, but He doesn’t think that way. That’s when I need a bunch of grace, until He returns me to the truth. Last year, when a Christian brother asked me a couple of months before he died, “Why hasn’t the Lord cleaned up my life better?” I told him, “Maybe it’s because it’s not his plan. He has done a good work in you but you’re just not much perfected, yet.” That had some truth to it, and he received some grace, but it did not remind him that the Lord was irrationally in love with him, just as he was, and at all times.

That was more than an oversight on my part. It was a lost opportunity rooted in the weakness of my knowledge of God’s love for me and us while we are in our sins and busy-mindedness. That was me, the kind of person who was more appreciative of being forgiven than for being loved by the forgiver. That is Pharisee-type stuff, not pretty for a disciple of Jesus, but that’s part of what I am learning -- the Lord loves self-righteous, self-centered disciples. We can come out of the closet.

So, since April 15th I have had time to reflect on my many lapses into unrighteousness and God’s ultimate, overpowering, unstoppable purposes. The Lord has been cleaning up my soul and showing me His love, by re-rehearsing with me my forgiven sins and sinfulness. For a few months I have been alone enough to give attention to the neglected things of my soul that for years have been lingering around the outskirts of my awareness.

Although I have a good deal of confidence that I have 12 more years of earth-life, it almost sounds as if the Lord is wrapping things up, doesn’t it? I think not. At least He is catching me up on my sanctification process. I want you to know that life up here at 90 is good and only getting better. I’m very thankful for your love and your helpfulness along the way. I hope to continue sharing life in the kingdom here with you for those 12 more years.

1. Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt into the wilderness where they “wandered” for 40 years. I use the biblical expression “wandered,” although they were carefully and deliberately led about in the wilderness by the Lord Himself with Moses being God’s human intermediary. Being constantly led by the Lord is not exactly wandering. But if you don’t know He brought you into your situation, and that He is leading you and providing for you every step of the tough and monotonous way, you certainly might feel like you are wandering in a wilderness. That is a painful and confusing way to believe and live in any sort of life. I can tell you it is painful.

Instead of crossing from Egypt through the wilderness into the Promised Land in less than 2 weeks, they “wandered” for those 40 years. Great and terrible things happening to them, but a large remnant did eventually come out the other side. They found the already-arranged victorious fulness of God for themselves in the Promised Land. Although each person there, with and including Moses, was able to be led by the Spirit personally, and many were, the reality of God’s planned life among them was more powerfully found in their being led corporately than in their being led individually. The truth of that corporate faithful life increased over those 40 years until it was God’s time for them to walk out together into the next stage of their life on earth. That was a major revelation to God’s people then, as it should be today. Recall that the events in the lives of God’s Old Testament people occurred to them for our New Testament people’s sakes, and were recorded for our sakes. They are especially designed to speak directly to us. See Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11; 2 Tim. 3:14-17.

Remember that Jesus’ prayer with His disciples on the night before He was arrested was for our unity, that we would be formed into and function as a unit. Could it be that our Father is waiting to send Jesus for us until we are living in that unity? At this thought, don’t look at those with whom you are already in unity, but at those with whom you are not yet in unity, and take action. [I said that because the deceiver is present. He would have us focus on the few in real unity instead of on the many in disunity. Now is the time for open ears to hear.]

That is a word to us, we who know what it is to be led personally by God’s Spirit. Among us we have lots of testimony of our being led one-on-one by the Spirit, but what I long to hear is the multiplied power of God’s Spirit speaking and leading His people corporately as a unit as clearly as He speaks to and leads faithful individuals. That will provide a “multiplied power” because it is the way of the cross – it requires a united death to selves unto spiritual unity, a joint life of going daily to the cross, together. You don’t need to be told that the individual can be led or misled easily by a mixture of the Spirit and his own thoughts and desires, therefore one has the potential to make a decision that is less powerful and has more possibility of error compared to the multiplied power and security of the group.

The divine logarithmic factor in group spiritual unity is found in Deuteronomy 32:30 (28-43) and Joshua 23:10 (9-11) – one puts 1,000 to flight, and 2 put 10,000 to flight. If we are listening, this speaks to a current and ongoing cause of the church’s weakness. We are spiritually weak, not hearing the Spirit speak His directions and corrections, and not allowing Him to lead us. If we are content with the current condition of the church, it is because we are self-centered or untaught. The Lord of the church wants His Body united, meaning functioning as a unit. The church’s two main problems are withing the church – division and corruption.

We are right to make many of our individual decisions wisely and faithfully, but multiple dynamics come into play when a group is faced with a “following the Spirit” decision. It can be so tough that the group may throw their hands in the air and go back to using good human reason and logic. At best, that leaves the group in a holding pattern, going nowhere. At the worst, they go back to a walk in the best flesh that they have available.

So, it is common for a non-religious group to use good common thinking to come to a group decision [education, honesty if possible, hard work], and it is common for a religious group to use good religious thinking to come to a group decision [be kind to everyone, support the church, give to those who help themselves], but hearing and following the Holy Spirit’s command is impossible without:

1. Group death to self – “Not what I want but what you [pl.] and the Lord want.”
2. Group life in the Spirit – “While walking together the way of the cross, we hear the Lord saying the same thing as our brothers hear.”

3) Group faithful submission and unity – “I will fully support what you brothers hear.”

4) Group time in order and rank – “Brother, you are the Lord’s anointed; I’m with you.”

5) Without the Lord’s abiding presence – Tying us together in love into the mind of Christ.

When our flesh is active, hearing the Spirit and doing His will is difficult and often impossible. And, in our flesh, the Spirit’s leading may not seem good; but the alternative leads us back to Egypt, to the old life. That course left many Israelites dead in the wilderness, and leaves many Christians dead-stymied in our wildernesses. Going back is not an option, but as long as we think it is an option, it is a deadly temptation.

The Lord of the Church is building His church, but He is not using inferior material to build the church that He said He would build, the church that would break down the gates of hell. Inferior material would never suffice for that project. But, the spirit of this world will use anything to build a counterfeit Christian religion, and He does. Where does Jesus get His material? Jesus gets His material from the same place the devil gets his material. He gets it from among the redeemed whom He has led into the wilderness. Wilderness time is prime material producing time, making the best stuff out of salvaged wreckage. [Selah] Many are called and do go into the wilderness because we wanted to escape from the miseries of our personal Egypts, but few are chosen by Him to build His victorious church. You know the story.

[NOTE: We are not dealing here with eternal salvation, but with faithfulness unto obedience, unto overcoming, unto available material for that which the Lord is using to produce Promised Land results here in this world. The Promised Land is not in heaven, but here in this world where the Lord fulfills His promises in our lives.]

[A TEST OF SPIRITUALITY: When the disciples walked with the Lord in Galilee, at times they were given of His Spirit and sent out in pairs to preach, heal the sick, and cast out demons. And they did exactly that. After Jesus returned to heaven, the Father granted disciples and others their own Holy Spirit anointing for the same purposes, and they did the same as they had with Jesus’ anointing. In third world countries, disciples are still doing the same, but in America it is uncommon. In Europe the gospel message has almost died, and very little Holy Spirit power remains. The test question is, “Why are so few demons being cast out of people in America?” Is it because we are a modern nation so, of course, do not believe in demonic spirits, so because we don’t believe in demonic spirits they don’t exist here? Is it because we don’t have demonic spirits in America and never have, or at least have not for years? Is it because we are oblivious to their presence and activity, and prefer our uninformed non-involvement? Is it because we Christians are spiritually dead, and ignore spiritualities, depending instead on psychiatry and drugs? (Are psychiatry and drugs working?) Do we see the holy spirituality of the kingdom of God and the evil spirituality of the kingdom of this world in our intense 24/7/364 battle, now? Again, why are so few demons being cast out of people in America?]

1. When Jesus walked about in Israel, He noted that the people were worshipping that which had to do with God, but not worshipping God. He said God is to be worshipped in Spirit and truth, and that people do not need to go to certain places to worship Him. It seemed that there were many belief systems, certainly many rules, traditions, and teachings – but they did not result in a relationship with God Himself. To some that may sound harsh, non-appreciative of honored traditions; and to some simply outright wrong – especially if applied to the church today. But we need to hear those very words. They have direct, but variable, application.
2. We have been praying and talking about the Lord’s soon coming. Peter [1 Pet. 4:7-11] has some good and godly advice. I will paraphrase it. “The end of all things has come; therefore, keep your head screwed on rightly because your prayers are being attended by the Creator Lord Himself. Your most important behavioral practice is loving one another. Why? Because love covers sins that your confessions do not touch.

“Doing good deeds can be lightly rewarding while you are doing them, but the big payoff is coming, so be sure that your well-known boundless hospitality is without complaint. Each of us has at least one spiritual gift to exercise in the body of Christ, so serve it up to one another generously, remembering that its source is actually the Lord. Don’t be a blabber mouth; you speak for the Lord in all things. God will grant you strength and clarity because you are dedicated to speaking for Him. He is pleased with you and your words. That’s the way it is today and it will be that way forever.”

1. “When Christ died, He left a will in which He gave His soul to His Father, His body to Joseph of Arimathea, His clothes to the soldiers, and His mother to John. But to His disciples, who had left all to follow Him, He left not silver or gold, but something far better – His PEACE!” – Matthew Henry.
2. One day in a tough situation with the Lord is better than a thousand easy days without Him. It is better to clean toilet bowls for the Lord, than to be without Him and have everything and everyone you desire whenever you ask – Ps. 84:10.