THOUGHTS OF MAY, 2020

1. “.. the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” The small gate is Jesus, and there are those who try to widen Him. But He is small. He is the only way to life in our heavenly Father’s family, meaning that we must be born again only through faith in Him, not by any other of our logical, reasonable and preferred ways. He presents Himself to us in scripture and by revelation of the Holy Spirit. He is so big and so everything, yet He is humble, small and the only way to salvation. The squeeze is on us, to enter through only Him, the meek and lowly One who died for us on the cross.

After we have entered the small gate, we have only begun our pursuit of Life. We are now on a narrow path. We had been selected to enter the gate; none could enter otherwise. But now we are through it and “in.” The small gate has put us on a path that is narrow, winding, up and down, around or through mud puddles, and associates us with others who are finding their way, making decisions, doing both well and poorly, and considering whether they want the best of Life that is at the end of the narrow path.

We had been given free passage through the small gate, but walking the path is expensive to us, to the big ME. Some decide that getting their dose or taste of Life as they entered through the small gate was good enough. It was wonderful, and it presented us with a grand testimony. Others are motivated by that taste so they press onward for more – some press for all that is available. The small gate opened the way to a whole new Life, not only a life of personal blessings and freedom. We are determined to walk it to its end. Let’s keep going!

1. Remember to judge all things. Don’t be reluctant. The spiritual person judges all things – 1 Corinthians 2:15. But that is not the end of the Lord’s instructions regarding our judging. Add to it that the One who is able to take the next step, to condemn after judging, must be sinlessly perfect. That means the Lord is the only condemner/assigner of punishment. But we must do the preliminary work of judging and then be ready to 1) have mercy, lifting the fallen one up in merciful actions of many possible sorts and/or 2) set punishment as directed by the Lord.

That means if we are called to set punish in a human court of justice, the guilty one having been duly and righteously judged to be guilty, the Lord has already set the punishment guidelines. We, having accepted His righteous judgment process [impartiality, witnesses, etc.], then apply His balanced punishment. We are to judge all things, but the only truly sinless Judge is the only One who is to condemn the guilty. Judeo-Christian standards for jury and punishment stages give us great responsibility for judging, and leaves punishment in the Lord’s hands.

Learning God’s ways and how to trust Him is a big part of walking the narrow way. Those who have passed through the small gate and are on the narrow way find it more and more possible to judge, and to do it righteously, [and more and more possible to judge, and not do it unrighteously].

1. When you are in a tough place financially, health-wise, personally, etc., don’t forget to recheck your bearings before going forward [waging battle]. It’s like checking your wallet before going into a cash-only store. A good place to start is Ephesians 1:20-21, which will remind you that you are good to go because Jesus, 1) has been raised from the dead and 2) is seated at the right hand of His and our Father, 3) far above all principalities and powers. 4) And we are embedded in Him permanently. 5) And He is interceding for us, always. 6) And He is continually doing wonderful, miraculous things for those who simply trust and obey Him, and work. When we are confident in the basics, 7) we are ready to move ahead.
2. Job was solid with the Lord. He was so solid that other mature faithful believers could not touch him [meaning change or weaken his confidence in the Lord]. His basic needs: 1) “Lord, don’t leave me.” 2) “Lord, don’t let my fear of you turn to being afraid of you.” That’s Job 13:20-21. Job is a very reliable brother.

What are the Lord’s commonly used means to build in and through you? How about Christian fellowship, time spent in His printed word, personal prayer, communion [the Lord’s Supper], and pain and other distress? Those are foundational, are they not? Notice that I have omitted some of the fluffy ones, like social, professional and financial success, public-type talents, and other well-earned, needed notorieties. Different strokes from different folks.

1. I have heard too little of Aaron’s benediction: “The Lord bless you, and keep you; the Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace.” That in Numbers 6:22-27. That’s a good, wholesome and faithful word, and I hope to hear more of it.
2. Our brother A. H. in Scotland is worth listening to. He has now written an article titled “Change.” I will share it with you.

 “To start the conversation, here are three attention getters on ‘change.’ ‘Men marry women with the hope they will never change. Women marry men with the hope they will change. Invariably they are both disappointed’ – Albert Einstein. Second, ‘If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.’ And lastly, a good definition of madness is repeating the same actions and expecting a different result.

 “Love it or loathe it, change is all around. The world is tilted 23.5 degrees from the vertical which causes the world to change through our four seasons as we orbit the sun, giving us the changes of night and day, phases of the moon, effects of the tides, and more.

 “Some believe we cannot change. Some believe our character and behavior are fixed by our stars of the horoscope. In some ways they may be right, although it is most unwise to consult our horoscope for daily guidance.

 “Many refuse to change. They find it so painful that they shun the possibility that change may be best, and required. Some have even described change as if they are going to die. They convince themselves that their way is the right way and rationalize change as unnecessary. These are closely related to and overlap with those who believe everyone else around them has to change to accommodate their ideas. They are often perfectionists who spend vast amounts of energy learning the ‘right way’ to do things in order to defend themselves against any criticism. They are quick to point out to others their folly should they deviate from this, and also quick to defend themselves as ‘only human’ or ‘everybody does it’ should someone point out that they are doing the very thing they are critical of. They often have few friends.

 “Some people embrace change. For them, the only good things are new things, or ideas. Everything else is dismissed as ‘old fashioned,’ ‘out of date’, or ‘of its time.’ They cannot settle unless they have the latest gadget and often throw away perfectly serviceable items just to have something with extra features which they will seldom use. They are never satisfied.

 “As humans, we are unable to change ourselves. We can alter our behavior briefly, especially if we are in danger of breaking the law with the threat of punishment. Although we may tinker around the edges, we remain basically the same inside, seeking our own way. Real change can only be wrought by God. Israel spent 40 years being changed by their desert wanderings as they were placed in impossible situations and saw God work necessary miracles. Many did not change. Those died in the wilderness. Only then were the remainder allowed to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. Even those changes proved only temporary as subsequent generations of rebellion proved.

 “In ‘The Voyage of the Dawn Treader,’ by C. S. Lewis, Eustace is a boy who ‘knows everything’ and is very selfish and unpleasant. He is turned into a mute dragon who has a gold band fixed tightly and painfully around his leg. He meets the lion, Aslan, who tells him he must undress before soothing his leg in a cool pool. Eustace then decides to shed his skin: ‘But just as I was going to put my feet into the water I looked down and saw that they were all hard and rough and wrinkled and scaly just as they had been before. Oh, that’s all right, said I, it only means I have another smaller suit on underneath the first one, and I’ll have to get out of it, too. So, I scratched and tore again and this under-skin peeled off beautifully and out I stepped and left it lying beside the other one, and went down to the well for my bath.’

 “Well, exactly the same thing happened again. And I thought to myself, ‘Oh dear, however many skins have I got to take off?’ For I was longing to bathe my leg. So, I scratched away for the third time and got off a third skin, just like the two others, and stepped out of it. But as soon as I looked at myself in the water, I knew it had been no good.

 “Then the lion said – but I don’t know if it spoke – **‘You will have to let me undress you.’** I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it.

 “The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I’ve ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off.

 “After his encounter with Aslan, Eustace was changed back into a boy, a completely new person.

 “ Eustace’s experience has always struck me as an ideal picture of God changing us. He takes us to places which are unbearable to the flesh, where we have to submit to Him often from a place of desperation.

 “I recall a particularly difficult time in my life when I was experiencing a lot of bad stuff from someone who had no intention of changing, and was blaming me for their problems. I would have loved to pray, ‘Lord, change them! This is unbearable!’ I could not do it, so I shouted out aloud while driving the car, ‘Change me!’ The circumstances did not change, but I was strengthened and able to bear much more than I could ever have imagined.

 “So, what is change in the Christian life? How does it happen? In short, it is the Way of the Cross. It is seeking to do God’s will and allowing Him to put our flesh to death. It is death to the self, and new life in Christ. It is a 180 degrees about-turn allowing the Lord to change our minds. It is invariably painful and sometimes shocking to our spirit and soul. We emerge different people. More like Jesus. The Christian Life is a life of change cradled by a Loving Father.

 “One of our dear sisters had a mighty conversion and baptism in the Holy Spirit from being a committed atheist. She was taken aside by her then pastor who said, ‘Listen, lass. God wants to change you.’ She replied, ‘Actually I am quite happy as I am.’ He literally fell off his chair laughing. He had never heard a response like it, but she was being bluntly honest. God did change her, but only through some of the most fiery trials imaginable including her husband divorcing her and the loss of her children. The latter were miraculously restored. She rather lightly describes it as, ‘God changed me from the very cheeky besom (a mildly derogatory Scots slang for ‘a difficult woman’) I was into the cheeky besom I am now.”

 “God knows what He is doing and will always answer the prayer, ‘Change me.’ We can trust Him to complete the task as we submit to His perfect will. He will sustain us through all the fiery trials.”

That is a good word, A. H. There is no way we can avoid life’s trials, but we can allow the Lord to change us in them for the better, or we can resist Him. When we resist Him, we still change but for the worst, with bitterness and hard-heartedness the result. And I am talking about Christians, not only unbelievers.

1. We who consider ourselves among those who honor, love and exalt God’s word need to go through a time of loosening up from time to time. If we don’t, we become set in our theology, thinking that we have the full, perfect and locked up knowledge of God – and that we are the keepers of the archives. But we don’t; not the Pentecostals, not the Evangelicals, and not the Catholics.

You have undoubtedly been concerned about Phariseeism in yourself [congratulations] or others, and know what I’m talking about. Phariseeism closes your mind to anything you did not already know, or that did not originate with you or yours. It blinds you to greater or smaller truth, like the Pharisees who encountered the Truth, Jesus.

In 2 Chronicles 29, Hezekiah succeeded his father Ahaz as king of Judah. In the first month of his reign he began repairs on the dilapidated temple, re-consecrated the apostate priests, and cleaned up the whole mess of temple life and worship. He called a spade a spade, that they and their fathers had done evil in the sight of the Lord their God. As a result, their nation had fallen apart, people been killed by invaders and others taken captive.

Brothers and sisters that is the condition of the church now. Like those people of God, we have a mixed life of love and service to the Lord, and gross, Laodicean carnality. King Hezekiah began doing what was right in the Lord’s eyes, and the Lord gave grace for repentance of some others so that Hezekiah’s call for change was heard and directions followed. It took them two weeks to clean up, repair and consecrate the temple which had been converted for pagan worship. Offerings were made to the Lord and the whole assembly worshipped for the first time in 16 years.

This is where we as lovers of God and His Word join Hezekiah’s story in this Thought. Unfortunately for those Old Testament believers, the most important festival of the year had just been missed – Passover. The Lord had not made Passover an option, and this penitent minority were convicted of their sinfulness. Would they have to wait a whole year to celebrate Passover? God’s word was Law to them, including when to observe Passover, and they now desired to honor His word/Law.

Hezekiah and those few faithful ones decided to celebrate Passover even though a month late. The masses scorned and ridiculed the messengers who were sent throughout the land, but a goodly crowd assembled in Jerusalem. A revival had started. But another problem was presented – the people had not consecrated themselves – another requirement. They would be doing another forbidden thing. They were ceremonially unclean. Knowing that the peoples’ hearts were toward the Lord and were seeking Him, Hezekiah prayed for God’s pardon, and they ate the Passover, thus officially breaking God’s Law as given through Moses.

Verse 20 says that the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people. They gave thanks to the Lord, celebrated the seven days of Passover, and decided to break the Law again by celebrating another seven days. They [and the Lord] were filled with joy. It is easy for Christians to miss the magnitude of that “stretch” of the celebration of Pentecost, but those Israelites who repented and loved the Lord got a great taste of release from the absoluteness of the Law. They then resumed doing things according to the Law.

Those who did not care anything about celebrating Passover, and those who refused to violate the Law of Moses, simply lost out on a great dose of “non-biblical grace.” But that is the nature of grace. A common definition of grace is: Grace is that which the Lord gives us to enable us to fulfill His word. Non-Pharisees can add: Grace is that which the Lord gives us to enable us to do contrary to the supposed narrowness or thinness of His word, to expand His word more fully.

A well-known New Testament application of this Thought is found in the story of the adulteress who was caught in the act and was brought to Jesus. The Law of Moses, which Jesus Himself had spoken to Moses and had Himself written in stone by His own finger, said she was to be stoned to death, but Jesus delivered her from her Pharisaical Biblicists and forgave her.

If this Thought has helped us loosen up, we may safely continue honoring, loving and exalting the Lord and His Word. But check yourself out the next time you see someone reverently violating God’s Word. Recognize God’s grace and don’t wrestle against it.

At another time we will talk about taking license with God’s word, a definite No-No. Thank the Lord for the living Holy Spirit who presents us with difficult situations and apparently contrary understandings, makes the way clear for us, and leads us through them and into their application for Life.

1. “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes” – Prov. 21:1. There are many example of that truth in scripture, and life experiences agree over and over. The key is often true humility, a very powerful tool of the Lord but hard to come by in daily life – which is where it is if you have it. The flesh tries to turn decisions [not hearts] by power, persuasion, trade-offs, bribes, etc. Humility goes to the heart. Humility sets captives free, promotes slaves to leadership, and unites enemies. Find humility and the king and his kingdom are yours.
2. What is it about coming together that draws and excites Christians? It may be expressed many ways, but I’ll call it the presence of the Lord. He and what He has done, and what He may do at any time, are eternal-quality attractions. He is love, excitement, acceptance, peace, protection, provision, etc. All of that, and more, are supplied by Him, especially when we live and breathe in His body because Jesus is in us, in our midst. We are drawn together, set free to love and be loved, and are available for Him to live again among corporate humanity even after 2,000 years. Unimaginable, but that is the truth about the body of Christ. It may be mostly my experience, but His presence is more likely to be experienced in a small group [even two or three] than among hundreds and thousands.
3. It’s a matter of knowing the truth. Example: If a large comet was scheduled to hit the earth within a month, what would be revealed among the masses? It doesn’t take much imagination to be able to list fear, confusion, anarchy, unbelief and much more of the like. Notice that knowledge of the comet would not be causing those things, but would reveal or uncover them in us. It’s a matter of knowing the truth. But on the other hand, solidly good and eternal stuff would also be revealed among the faithful, confident, called ones.
4. The most dangerous thing to liberty is not totalitarianism, even as bad as Marxist tyranny is, but that liberty may lose its guide and foundation of truth [faith with reason]. Freedom and truth can be divided, so that you have neither. They then leave a mixture of something called liberty and moral relativism. The truth then becomes whatever the most powerful or the loudest say it is. A culture that sustains freedom and truth will abound in self-sacrifice, responsible service, order in all its parts, people ahead of profits, self-control, and a true free market economy. The church [God alive in society] produces all of that. When the church fails, all of that fails. When the church is taken out of the world at the rapture, anything goes and the world goes with anything.
5. Who can understand or dissect God’s grace? We can say many things about it, perhaps even enough to satisfy human curiosity, but it is unfathomable. His grace flows endlessly, almost without hinderance, but certainly with modifications as far our experience and what we understand in scripture.

Consider the grace needed before we will follow Him. We must first die if we want to Live. We have to lose our life [and specifically for His sake] before we can find Life – Matt. 16:25. That’s grace to die before we get what we want. But Jesus showed us the way in that, also. He died on the cross before He got the Life He wanted – and He got it! So do we.

I don’t have to tell all of you this, although some still don’t know it, that the reason we don’t have the Life offered us by the Lord is because we have not yet laid down our lives. We want more of His goodies before yielding up that which we already have, if even then. We like what we have, and could not imagine doing without it [them], so have decided [and this is a fatal decision, spiritually] to hold onto it [them] until we get the other or more that we have been hoping and praying for.

Re-read and meditate over Matthew 16:25. There is no way to bypass those words. As I have said before, we get what we pay for. Once He freely places Himself into us, if we want something, we pay for it – our junk for His riches. The junk may relate to people, but is not the people. Many relationships with individuals or groups or nations have to be laid aside before the Lord will give us or them Life in return – with or without those people, groups or nations. But we hold onto them, remembering that He had given them to us, but not remembering that the Lord gives and He takes away – blessed be the Name of the Lord – Job 1:21.

The summary of this Thought: Hold God’s gifts up to Him on an open palm. When we keep our fingers closed, it is a painful parting, or no parting. Anything we keep that the Lord wants, has the eternal Life purpose squeezed out of it. Give it/them to Him. Let His grace flow. Yes, the teacher has fresh testimony on this.

1. The reward for being an overcomer: “To eat of the tree of life, and not be hurt of the second death – to eat of the hidden manna and possess a white stone with a new name – to be given power over the nations – to be clad in white raiment and permanently inscribed in the Book of Life and be recommended by Christ to the Father and His angels – to be a pillar in God’s Temple and have His name written upon us – to be seated with Him in His throne – to inherent all things and to be a son of God. Focus on these things, and the challenges of this life will melt away in the perspective of His loving kindness.” -- [borrowed].

Why not be an overcomer? Obviously, being an overcomer is not an automatic result of being born again. Something of ourselves is responsible for our becoming an overcomer. See those somethings in the Revelation chapters 2, 3, and 21:7.

1. There is the gospel ministry that is all-day, full-time, lived in and before the world. And there are occasional street ministries when our listeners may get a dose of the gospel, then they move on. But then there are those Spirit-scheduled ministries when we are directed to make contact with someone(s) and the fruit is immediate and abundant. Peter’s ministry to Cornelius’ household was of this type – Acts 10. There was no wasted seed cast on stony ground; no pearls cast before swine; only fruit. We are in all types, if we will.
2. Our brother A. H. in Scotland has become an anointed writer of the gospel. This is his second article in this month’s THOUGHTS. I would say that he has insight, humility and simplicity. Those go a long way in the kingdom. Here is another of his contributions.

The story of the woman at the well has always fascinated me. Jesus, tired and thirsty, rests while the disciples head into town. Jesus elsewhere warns His disciples not to cast their pearls before swine. If ever there was a pig in human form it is this woman. First of all, she was a Samaritan. Jesus was called to preach to the Jews. Samaritans were despised. Plus, women were not held in high regard. This one was a blatant “sinner.” She had gone through five husbands and was now on her sixth relationship. Despite repeated searches for love and stability she had been disappointed on each occasion. She was a foul person. And she knew it. The towns folk also knew it and would not let her forget it. She was a pariah.

This is the person Jesus chooses to engage. A simple request for a drink sparks a conversation. She protests then Jesus offers her living water which will well up within her to eternal life.

Her response: “Sir, give me this water...” She does not understand what she is saying, but something deep within her soul leaps at the chance, at last, of something permanent in her life. She craves this water which she sees is the only thing which can satisfy the aching thirst inside her.

Soon the disciples return and she abandons her water jar and rushes home. The town breaks out in revival. Neither Jesus nor the woman got the physical water they were looking for.

Compare this to John 7:28ff. Jesus is teaching in the temple courts. The righteous Pharisees are analysing closely His every word to see if they can catch Him out. They are also observing the crowd to assess their reaction to His claims and actions and repeatedly try to arrest Him. On the last day of the feast He makes the same announcement [v. 37-38] as to the Samaritan woman; “Come and drink some of my living water.” What a different response! They discuss the matter amongst themselves and argue the details of scripture. They are divided and others wanted to seize Him to shut Him up.

They were not thirsty. They were content with their own righteousness. They were not crying out for this water. In fact, they saw no need of it.

Who would we rather be? A recognised sinner without hope or a knowledgeable good person who doesn’t see the need for the living water on offer? Obviously, a rhetorical question.

Jesus reached into my foul life and gave me the gift of living water and eternal life. Hallelujah!

1. I’ll wager that when you were in school [at any level] that you did not complain about things being too simple. But if our teacher noticed that a simple basic principle was missing in our education, she would take us back and help us grasp it before going forward. Paul was a good teacher. He would repeat unlearned essential lessons.

Let me present one to us right here: “IF WE HAVE BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST, IT IS NO LONGER WE WHO LIVE, BUT CHRIST WHO LIVES IN US” – Gal. 2:20 with pronouns edited. For that to be true of any of us, we must be 1) born again of God’s Spirit, 2) know and accept that truth, and 3) be on the crosswalk applying that truth daily. That is simple and basic. We cannot go up against it like it is an impassible stone wall, and just sit there in church the remainder of our lives.

Don’t settle for being a good, average Laodicean Christian, thinking that you have need of nothing except a little more polish before going to heaven. A Christian is someone who has been crucified with Christ and has no life of his own. Is not that the meaning of Galatians 2:20?

1. Our imagination is a gift of God, our creator. When He made us, He looked at us [body and soul] and was pleased – including that we had imagination. Without an imagination, we could not have faith. With a great imagination we can have great faith, work wonders, be inventive, stay out of trouble, and see eternal realities.

In Ephesian 2:4-6 we are given an exercise on using our imagination. Have you checked your imagination on how it is for you to now be sitting in the heavenly places in Jesus at the right hand of our Father? You might go sit in a comfortable place for a while and meditate on that, developing some imagination muscles. He tells us those things so that we may grasp them and be grasped by them, not only to know them factually.

1. Yes, our Creator gave us a mind and ability to think, even to use it to do our own thing. We can fill our minds with all sorts of attitudes, with good and bad information, and develop bad desires – whatever we want. It’s our mind. But there are two basic sources and types of thinking, of information and desires. One type is flesh and blood, or natural, or reasoning, or human knowledge. That doesn’t have to be evil in itself, but it is simply human level, that anyone can think up, although some of it requires a very intelligent mind [and some of it requires a very ignorant mind]. Because of its source [us], we have reason to boast, or at least to attribute it to ourselves. This knowledge can go in any direction in regards to morality, ethics, God/gods worship, atheism, etc. This knowledge comes from what the Bible calls the tree of knowledge – Gen. 2 and 3.

There is another kind and source of knowledge, and it comes straight from the Lord. It is called “revelation.” In it, we have no room to boast because it comes only from the Lord. It is God’s gift, comes by grace, and we cannot merit it. When we get it, if we take credit for it, we are stealing glory [notoriety, credit] from the Lord. We can get it from others as information, but it is not alive and transformational in us until and unless it is given by revelation – which we can receive even years after receiving it by simple human information means.

We can become veritable human factories of information, including of religious information, but it is not life-changing until it comes by revelation into our souls. This is the tree of Life, which Peter experienced, and Jesus described, in Matthew 16:17 – “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” Revelation is that rock upon which Jesus builds His church, the church that the gates of Hades will not overpower. Human understanding of the same information can bring forth religiosity, but revelation brings Life.

1. A bit more on discipleship. A disciple is more than one who knows that Jesus, the Son of God, lived a perfect life in human flesh, died on the cross, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of God. The devil knows all of that truth, and more. But he has not accepted those truths for himself; he has not surrendered himself into those truths. I tremble when I think of how many who are labeled as Christian have done no more than has the devil. Disciples of Jesus enter into the experience of the cross, know and love Jesus’ gift and does the same, has taken up his own cross, and is following Jesus.
2. John 15:16 is not the full gospel, but it is an important outline for disciples’ lives. It reads: “You [disciples] did not choose Me but I chose you [the eternal God entered the world and picked the time, place and persons], and appointed you [no accident, and not haphazard] that you would go [wherever He sends us] and bear fruit [the fruit and fruitfulness of Jesus Himself], and that your fruit would remain [probably in this world, but definitely in eternity], so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name [that’s putting some of the onus of desire, faith and righteousness on us for aligning ourselves as did Jesus] He may [therefore be pleased and freed to] give to you.” That is an encouraging word to disciples, is it not?
3. Take some time to reflect on your conversion experience, to see why you responded to the Lord’s call to Him. Was it for deliverance from hell, or from sin, or from self, to a better and more peaceful life, to be with Him personally, to be an official member of the church, to be like the others in your group, that you needed a new start in life, or any of a number of other reasons? Like recruits joining the military, there are many different reasons for our joining up on our own.

If we simply joined ourselves to an attractive religious organization, we started from w-a-a-a-y back and have since [hopefully] been brought along the way and have met Jesus. Anyway, there are many different testimonies on “coming to Jesus.” But like in the military, in which case we were called into service by the government, it is the Lord who calls us into the church. That is a weak way to say that we are called into Him. The Lord pointed at us, and said, “I want you!” So we joined up, no matter our self-focus, and we were on our way.

All of that is to say that we have radical conversions like did Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, and we have back door conversions that eventually lead to reality. The Lord calls us out of our wanderings, our prisons, our self-unfulfilled lives toward and into Him. There are many routes but only one door opens to eternal life. That door is Jesus Christ.

1. When we imagine God, who is a spirit and whom we have never seen, we use human imaging to imagine Him. We are not too far off base if we use our biblically and spiritually informed imagination of Jesus of Nazareth as our guide to do our imagining of God. We need to imagine God for several reasons, one of which is to properly relate to our brother and sister Christians – 2 Cor. 5:16-19. We see them as new creatures, in whom their old ways have passed away.

That helps, especially when they have really messed up and need a hand up instead of a push down. Some may require years of that reality-relating before they too begin to see God’s truth about themselves. That is better than simply tolerating them, although tolerating them is better than rejecting them. Rejecting them is relating to them according to their flesh, which is like tying a brick to the ankle of a drowning man.

1. SPECIAL NOTE: I teach a Bible Lesson every Wednesday noon from 12:15 until 12:45 Central Time. It’s a telephone conference call connection, no charge, and if you use one of those special phone connections you can avoid long distance charges from anywhere in the world. Kate Word at katesbranch@gmail.com will give you the connections and instructions needed. If you miss it, and ask, she will e-mail you a recording. Help yourself. Freely we received and freely we give.