THOUGHTS OF JANUARY, 2015

1. If the Pastor of your congregation is indeed a Pastor it is not his responsibility [nor his spiritual calling or anointing] to evangelize the congregation or its visitors. The effect of his pastoral ministry, no matter how he may try to broaden it, is to gather sheep together. That means “to unify sheep under Jesus, and around himself as God’s local shepherd of that flock.” If his is the only ministry the flock receives, it [the pastoral ministry] will eventually “put them to sleep” together as a unit/flock, becoming gospel hardened and complacent. Others will leave, seeking the remedy of a more lively flock.

They suffer from lack of the presence and ministry of an Evangelist. After a bit of exploring, they will find a flock that is “shepherded” by an evangelist, where they will become more lively and faith-living but in due time will notice that sheep are leaving that flock because the spiritual flow there is pushing them to extend themselves beyond that which is reasonable or possible. And they do not have quality flock-life as can be supplied by a genuine Pastor.

The cycle continues due to the one-ministry church program. How often we have noticed that the anointing of a “pastor” is as an Administrator! The business and functions of the church are the best possible manifestation of Christian order. Things flow smoothly. Eventually the lack of pastoral and evangelistic ministries become evident, as above. So it goes when the church lacks any of the others of the five-fold ministry of Ephesians 4:11.

The Lord means for the church to have both the Pastoral and Evangelistic ministries of the Word of God functioning at the same time, continually. Together they produce liveliness and unity. Liveliness without unity produces division; unity without liveliness produces sleepiness and lethargy.

There are three other anointings on the ministers of God’s word: Apostle, Prophet and Teacher. All five of these ministries of the Word are meant to be functional in the daily life of the church, similar to a physician needing all types of medications for the care of his patients [such as antibiotics, heart meds, blood pressure meds, pain meds and hormones – to name a few types]. Briefly: the ministry of the Teacher is to accurately inform the flock of God’s ways; of the Prophet to bring a timely and accurate word from the throne of God to that flock; and of the Apostle to keep the flock firmly grounded [or re-grounded] on Jesus the Rock of our salvation.

The malnutrition and anemia of today’s church is erroneously considered to be normal, but leaves us lacking the ministry of Christ. The five-fold ministry of God’s Word as seen in Jesus is designed to make and keep us whole. The last several verses of the Book of Acts chapters 2 and 4 are given us as examples of what the Lord of the church will do when He is the builder and head of the church. The purposes and effects of those ministries united and functioning in brotherly love is given to us in Ephesians 4:11-16.

Why not?

2. Luke [2:41-52] wrote the personal bit that we know about Jesus between His toddler years in Bethlehem and the beginning of His ministry at age 30. Early during that span of probably 27 years Jesus gradually became aware of who He was. That information/revelation was spotty to Him at times and had to be integrated into His natural life, which we are shown happening in those verses. His had to be one life, not functioning part of the time as His spiritual life and part of the time as His natural life – with all of its many variables.

Notice that in these verses He was drawn to and had decided to pursue His sonship responsibilities in the temple with the religious leaders. I don’t think we should entertain that He was forgetful of His human sonship responsibility for leaving town with His parents. I think He made a conscious decision to remain in Jerusalem. When His parents corrected Him for being disobedient, He explained Himself and thereafter continued faithfully in His human responsibilities, that of a human son being obedient to His human parents, while His patient parents worked with Him regarding His spiritual growth and heavenly uniqueness. That uniqueness was poorly understood by all, including by Him.

My point is that when we have been born again, have received the Spirit, and have been anointed for life and service we too still have God-given natural relationships and responsibilities. We may try to be spiritual at times and natural at other times, but schizophrenia in any form does not work well. We don’t have two parallel lives to live during our one life on earth. Our new life is “integrate-able” with the higher elements of our natural life according to our time, place and calling in God. One life does not take precedence over the other but does take variable time and place predominance.

Jesus had to work through that integration, as do we. Joseph’s disappearance from Scripture record, probably by death, was necessary if Jesus was to continue to righteously integrate the spiritual and natural aspects of His growth. As the elder son He became the head of the family. That gave Him more room/flexibility, even to being able to leave the family, home and job to go on His traveling ministry at age 30 – Luke 3:23. By then He had brothers who were adults, able to do the family business, and one of them [probably brother James] assumed headship of the family.

When the family did not like the way He and His ministry were going they tried a family group-effort to retrieve Him, which did not work – Mark 3:21. He was now partly and properly detached from His natural family. At age 12, being a young boy with both parents alive, His situation had been entirely different.

Jesus did all things well and “by the Book.” Follow Him.

3. Keep praying and trying, but remember that things grow through proper use of that which we already have.

4. Flu vaccine, polio vaccine, and others are made different ways. The two main ways are by either killing the germ [bacteria or virus] or weakening it so it cannot cause disease. Then when it is injected into the person it does not cause the illness but its presence does stir a response in the body’s immune system because it ”thinks” the active germ has arrived in the body. Result: The real, live, powerful thing was never present but there is now a resistance to the real thing. The person has been immunized.

There are many reasons why unbelievers and believers resist the gospel. It has been said that the main reason is that resistors have previously received small, dead or weakened doses of the gospel and have become immunized to the real thing.

5. The present pope, called by some Protestants “the Bishop of Rome,” has been moving mountains in and around the Vatican. From his youth he was raised to be brothers and brotherly with all Christians and is carrying that message and those actions forward into his present life. Some news services, who poorly understand religious [especially spiritual] things, have actually published their own perspectives and interpretations of his speeches. It is good to read his documents in their translated original forms after being stirred by the news reports, many of which misinterpret him.

The pope has good ideas about the business world. He sees it as a ministry, a vocation. I will add that everything is a ministry/servant’s offering/vocation/calling of God. As such, jobs and businesses have values that are higher than economic values. Those values are shown in many ways, such as through generosity and mentoring of those called to those particular workplace ministries.

There is a thought among some that prosperous businesses and businessmen/women should “give back to the community,” usually meaning some of their financial profits that “they made off of the community.” That sounds wrong to me, in the sense that business people are continually serving the community with their products and service and through employing people. They gave to the community as they labored to serve.

6. This Thought is a homily that I gave at a memorial service for a fine Christian brother, Ralph. It was a service that was open to the public and, since he is no longer with us, I will use his real first name here.

RALPH WOULD HAVE BEEN ONLY 84 ON FEBRUARY 6TH OF THIS YEAR [2015]. HE CHECKED OUT EARLY, NOT BECAUSE HE WAS IMPATIENT BUT BECAUSE HE AND THE LORD WERE READY. THAT COULD BRING UP SOME INTERESTING TOPICS SUCH AS: EARTH-LIFE LONGIVITY, HEAVENLY REWARDS, THE SEVERAL LOCATIONS OF OUR CHRISTIAN AFTERLIFE; OUR LEGACIES [SHORT RANGE AND PERSON FOCUSED] VS. OUR CONTRIBUTION TO GOD’S HARVEST [LONGER RANGE AND KINGDOM-FRUIT FOCUSED].

THIS IS A TIME FOR US TO FEEL GOOD. IF YOU WANT TO HAVE A WARM SPIRITUAL FUZZY, ENJOY THINKING THAT RALPH IS SITTING UP THERE ON A CLOUD, PLAYING A HARP, WATCHING AND HEARING US TODAY. OR THAT HE AND OTHERS OF HIS EARTHLIFE ACQUAINTANCE ARE AGAIN ENJOYING ONE ANOTHER. OR THAT RALPH IS IN THE PRESENCE OF JESUS, HAVING SOME INDESCRIBABLY WONDERFUL FELLOWSHIP, COMPLETELY FORGETTING THAT HE WAS GOING TO ASK SOME EXTREMELY IMPORTANT QUESTIONS AS SOON AS HE GOT THERE.

SO LET YOUR MINDS WANDER AND WONDER. THIS MEMORIAL SERVICE IS FOR US. FUNERALS AND MEMORIAL SERVICES ARE FOR THE LIVING, NOT FOR THE DEAD. THOSE WHO TRY TO CONTROL THEIR OWN MEMORIAL SERVICES CAN DO A DISSERVICE TO THOSE ATTENDING THE SERVICE. RALPH’S DEPARTURE WAS NOT TRAGIC SO LET US HAVE A GOOD TIME! FOR FUTURE REFERENCE IN MY CASE, WILL YOU PLEASE REMEMBER THAT? AT 85 I PROBABLY HAVE ONLY 10 OR 20 MORE YEARS. ENJOY YOURSELVES WHEN THAT CELEBRATION COMES.

RALPH IS DOING FINE. THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN OUT OF THEIR BODIES, VISITED HEAVEN, AND RETURNED HAVE REPORTED HAVING NO DESIRE TO RETURN TO EARTH. APOSTLE PAUL’S OWN EXPERIENCE OF GOING TO HEAVEN AND RETURNING TO EARTH WAS TOO GOOD FOR HIM TO DESCRIBE, SO HE DIDN’T.

MEDICAL AND RELIGIOUS BOOKS AGREE ON AND DOCUMENT CERTAIN THINGS ABOUT LIFE AFTER DEATH TESTIMONIES. ONE EMERGENCY ROOM MEDICAL REPORT RECORDED THAT AS A PATIENT WAS RESUSCITATED HE SHOUTED, “DON’T LET ME DIE! DON’T LET ME DIE!” HE HAD NOT BEEN A BELIEVER, HAD HAD A DARK, TERRIFYING EXPERIENCE WHILE OUT OF HIS BODY, AND SAW THE RESUSCITATIVE EFFORTS ON HIS BEHALF AS HE REAPPROACHED HIS BODY. I DON’T KNOW HIS PRESENT CONDITION, BUT I TRUST THAT HE BECOMES A BELIEVER BEFORE HIS NEXT DEPARTURE.

ON THIS DELIGHTFUL OCCASION, A CERTAIN POEM ALWAYS COMES TO MIND:

HERE LIES THE BODY OF SOLOMON PEAS, UNDER THE DAISIES AND UNDER THE TREES. PEAS IS NOT HERE, ONLY HIS POD. PEAS SHELLED OUT AND WENT HOME TO GOD.

I THINK WE KNOW ONE ANOTHER IN RELATION TO OURSELVES MORE THAN WE KNOW OTHERS PURELY AS THEMSELVES. WE WANT PEOPLE TO ACTUALLY BE LIKE WE WANT THEM TO BE. IT’S SOMETHING THAT GOES ON IN OUR SELECTIVE AND IMAGINATIVE MINDS.

[STORY OF A 10-COW WIFE: A MAN FROM HIGH UP IN THE MOUNTAINS WAS READY TO TAKE A WIFE, BUT THERE WERE NO AVAILABLE WOMEN IN THE MOUNTAINS. HE RETURNED TO THE VALLEY, TO THE VILLAGE OF HIS FOREFATHERS, TO SELECT A WIFE. TO HIS SURPRISE, THERE WAS ONLY ONE AVAILABLE YOUNG LADY, AND SHE WAS LAZY, VERY FAT AND UGLY. THE GOING RATE FOR A WIFE WAS A SHEEP, OR A GOAT, OR 3 CHICKENS. HE OFFERED THE YOUNG LADY’S FATHER 10 COWS – AN UNHEARD OF PAYMENT, AND THE DEAL WAS MADE. MARRIED, THEY WENT UP THE MOUNTAIN. FIVE YEARS LATER THE COUPLE, WITH THEIR SMALL FAMILY, RETURNED TO THE VILLAGE FOR A VISIT. THE VILLAGE PEOPLE DID NOT RECOGNIZE HER. SHE WAS TRIM, BEAUTIFUL AND AN ACCOMPLISHED WIFE AND MOTHER. THE PEOPLE ASKED HIM HOW HE HAD BEEN ABLE TO CHANGE HER. HIS REPLY: “I TREATED HER LIKE A 10-COW WIFE.”]

WHEN WE SEE PEOPLE AS FRAIL SINNERS BUT RELATE TO THEM AS WHO THEY CAN BE THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS AND THROUGH FELLOWSHIP WITH US, WE HAVE JOINED THE LORD IN BEING CREATORS. THAT IS REALLY EFFECTIVE IN THE HANDS OF LOVING AND FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS. REMEMBER THAT AFTER GOD HAD CREATED ALL OF THE ANIMALS, HE PRESENTED THEM TO ADAM WITH INSTRUCTIONS FOR ADAM TO NAME THEM. WHATEVER ADAM NAMED THEM BECAME MORE THAN A NAME ON A NAME TAG – THEY TOOK ON THE NATURE OF THEIR NAME. ADAM IMPARTED TO THEM THEIR NATURE BY THEIR NAMES.

THAT HAS CONTINUED AMONG PEOPLE EVER SINCE. ABRAM [EXALTED FATHER] BECAME ABRAHAM [FATHER OF A GREAT MULTITUDE], JACOB [CHEAT] BECAME ISRAEL [PRINCE WITH GOD], JESUS [SAVIOR (NO BETTER NAME NEEDED OR POSSIBLE)], SAUL’S NAME WAS CHANGED TO PAUL, ETC. WE STILL NAME PEOPLE AFTER GOOD FAMILY MEMBERS OR HEROES, PARTLY TO HONOR OLDER FAMILY MEMBERS AND PARTLY TO IMPART THEIR CHARACTER TO THE CHILDREN. I WAS A VERY YOUNG BOY WHEN I WAS TOLD THAT “ROBERT” MEANS “BRAVE.” SOMETHING BRAVE STIRRED IN ME THAT DAY, AND STIRS YET IN MY MEMORY.

A LITTLE SIDE POINT: IT DOESN’T WORK IF WE IMAGINE GOD TO BE DIFFERENT THAN HE IS. HE DOESN’T CHANGE. HE IS ALREADY BETTER THAN WE CAN THINK HE IS. SO WE GET OUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD FROM THE BOOK HE HAS WRITTEN ABOUT HIMSELF, AND FROM HIS PERSONAL REVELATION TO US AS WE GET CLOSER TO HIM. DESPITE THAT, SOME STILL IMAGINE THEIR OWN GOD.

BUT WITH PEOPLE, SEEING THEM AS BEING DIFFERENT THAN THEY ARE HAS A REAL EFFECT, FOR GOOD OR FOR BAD. SEEING THEM AS BEING BAD AND BEYOND REDEMPTION BY US OR BY GOD IS A TERRIBLE PRISON TO PUT THEM IN. LORD, FORGIVE ME [AND POSSIBLY YOU] FOR DOING THAT NEGATIVELY TOO MANY TIMES.

BUT OUR FAITHFUL AND RECEPTIVE THOUGHTS, ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS OPEN A DOOR TO LIFE FOR THE WORST AROUND US, ALLOWING THEM TO STEP INTO OUR LIVES AS FRIENDS AND NEW CREATURES, IF THEY WANT TO – IF THAT IS THE STATE OF GOD’S GRACE WORKING IN THEIR SOULS.

THEREFORE, CHRISTLIKE BEHAVIOR IS AN INSTRUMENT IN THE HOLY SPIRIT’S HANDS. OUR PRESENCE MODIFIES OTHERS BEHAVIOR, FOR GOOD AS IN CHURCH ON SUNDAYS OR FOR BAD LIKE WHEN WE GET BEHIND THE WHEEL IN HEAVY TRAFFIC. [AT TIMES I WISH SOME DRIVERS WOULD TAKE THEIR JESUS STICKERS OFF OF THEIR CARS.] BEING CHRISTIAN INSTEAD OF CHRISTIANOID MAKES US EFFECTIVE TOOLS IN GOD’S HANDS FOR THE REMAKING OF OTHERS.

NOW I WILL GIVE MY OPINION OF RALPH, WHICH MAY BE DIFFERENT FROM YOUR OPINION BECAUSE OF THOSE VARIABLES. THEN I’LL SPEND SOME TIME ON WHY RALPH WAS LIKE HE WAS.

1. RALPH WAS SWEET. [IS THAT O.K. TO SAY ABOUT A MAN? HANDS UP, WOMEN, IF YOU KNOW A SWEET MAN.] WE SING “SWEET JESUS,” AND HE WAS A MAN. ALL LADIES ARE SWEET – RIGHT, MEN? BUT NOT ALL WOMEN ARE LADIES. SOME OF US MEN ARE CLOSET-SWEET, SO IT TAKES SPECIAL PEOPLE TO DRAW SWEETNESS OUT OF US. FOR RALPH I WILL DEFINE HIS SWEETNESS AS BEING GENTLE, RECEPTIVE AND WARM.

2. RALPH’S WORD WAS RELIABLE AND STEADY. HE WAS LIKE BARTHOLOMEW WHO, WHEN FIRST SEEN BY JESUS, JESUS SAID, “THIS IS A TRUE ISRAELITE; THERE IS NOTHING DECEPTIVE IN HIM.”

3. RALPH THOUGHT FIRST, THEN SPOKE. HIS WORDS WERE CONSIDERED. THEY CAME OUT OF WHERE HE WAS IN THE LORD, NOT FROM WHERE OTHERS WANTED HIM TO BE. HE TOOK OWNERSHIP OF WHAT HE SAID, KNOWING THAT GOD AND MAN WOULD RIGHTLY JUDGE HIM BY HIS WORDS. IT DID NOT TAKE OUR 49 YEARS TOGETHER TO KNOW THAT HIS WORDS WERE NOT DISTORTED, NOT HALF TRUTHS. HE THOUGHT, HE ZEROED IN ON WHAT HE WAS GOING TO SAY, AND THEN HE SAID IT IN SHORT-FORM.

4. RALPH DISPLAYED SUCH A PATIENT AND PEACEFUL PERSONALILTY THAT IT WAS EASY TO THINK OF HIM AS NOT HAVING HIS OWN DEFINITE, INDEPENDENT MIND. IF AT FIRST YOU DID NOT GET THAT STRAIGHT ABOUT HIM, YOU COULD LISTEN A BIT LONGER AND HEAR THAT HE WAS NOT NEUTRAL. HE JUST DID NOT STOMP HIS FEET TO GET ANYONE’S ATTENTION, OR RAISE HIS VOICE TO WIN A DEBATE.

5. RALPH KNEW THAT HE WAS COMPLETE IN JESUS, SO HE COULD WASH HIS BROTHER’S FEET WITHOUT EMBARRASSMENT OR SHOWMANSHIP. HE WAS NOT NEEDY, DESPITE HAVING NEEDS.

I WILL SUMMARIZE BY SAYING RALPH WAS REMAKABLY PEACEFUL AND AT REST DURING ALL OF THE YEARS I KNEW HIM. IF ANYONE WAS LOOKING FOR A JOHN WAYNE THEY PROBABLY MISSED SEEING HIM IN RALPH, BUT JOHN WAS THERE.

LET’S TALK ABOUT WHY RALPH WAS THE WAY I DESCRIBE HIM.

CONSIDER GOD’S PEOPLE, ISRAEL, WHO WERE IN THE WILDERNESS WITH GOD AND WITH MOSES FOR 40 YEARS. WE ARE TOLD THAT THE THINGS THAT HAPPENED TO THEM, AND THAT WHICH IS RECORDED ABOUT THEM, WERE FOR OUR BENEFITS. THAT MAKES THEIR HISTORY HIGHLY IMPORTANT TO US.

THOSE ISRAELITES WERE GOD’S CHOSEN PEOPLE, DELIVERED FROM SLAVERY. BUT SCRIPTURE SHOWS THEY DID NOT HAVE THOSE QUALITIES I APPRECIATED IN RALPH – RECEPTIVITY, STABILITY, HONESTY, PEACEFULNESS, PATIENCE, SATISFACTION, AND COMPLETENESS IN THE LORD. RALPH LIVED IN THOSE QUALITIES, EVEN WHILE GRIEVING OVER HIS AND OTHERS’ SINS AND SICKNESSES, AND HIS WIFE, SUE’S DEATH OF OVER A YEAR AGO.

WHY WERE MOST OF THE ISRAELITES THE OPPOSITE? THEY WERE SELF-WILLED, COMPLAINTIVE, EMOTIONALLY MOTIVATED, EASILY AGITATED, IMPATIENT, AND SAW THEMSELVES AS A NEEDY PEOPLE – ALL THE WHILE PROCLAIMING AN ALL-MIGHTY GOD. WHY DIDN’T THEY HAVE A HIGH LEVEL OF PEACE AND CONTENTMENT WHILE GOING THROUGH THEIR MANY DIFFICULTIES?! IF WE KNOW OURSELVES, WE KNOW THE ANSWER ABOUT THEM.

FOR BELIEVERS THE ANSWER LIES NOT IN SOMETHING LIKE “HAVING MORE FAITH,” BUT IN KNOWING GOD’S WAYS, AND EMBRACING THEM. THE ALL-MIGHTY ACCOUNTANT FOR EVERY BIRD IN THE SKY AND EVERY HAIR ON OUR HEAD CUSTOMIZES EVERY EVENT THAT TOUCHES OUR LIVES, AND PREVENTS ALL OTHER TOUCHES. HE IS THE ALL-MIGHTY. HE SAYS THAT ABOUT HIMSELF SO IT MUST BE TRUE!

NANCY’S CANCER TESTIMONY: TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO NANCY WAS DIAGNOSED WITH WIDESPREAD OVARIAN CANCER. SHE WAS GIVEN 20 TO 40 MONTHS TO LIVE, WITH TREATMENT. ONE MONTH LATER [AFTER SURGERY AND ONE OF SIX MONTHLY CHEMOTHERAPY TREATMENTS] SHE WAS CANCER-FREE AND HAS REMAINED THAT WAY. AS FAR AS MY RELATIONSHIP TO THAT PROCESS, I HAD GOTTEN ON MY KNEES AND PROCLAIMED MY LOVE FOR THE LORD AND THAT I TRUSTED HIM TO DO THE PERFECT THING WITH NANCY’S HEALTH AND LIFE, WHICH DID NOT HAVE TO INCLUDE HEALING HER. I TOLD HIM THAT IF HE TOOK HER I WOULD LOVE AND SERVE HIM THE REST OF MY LIFE ANYWAY, AND THAT HE DID NOT NEED TO CHANGE ANYTHING, KNOWING THAT WE ALWAYS RECEIVE HIS BEST FOR US. HE IS THE ALL-MIGHTY, ALL-LOVING, ALL-KNOWING GOD WHO DIED FOR US SO WE COULD ENTER HIS THIS-LIFE SABBATH REST AND LIVE IN THAT SORT OF RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

AS A RESULT OF RALPH’S CONFIDENCE IN GOD’S LOVE AND ALL-MIGHTINESS, AND HIS ACCEPTANCE OF GOD’S WAYS AND WILL FOR HIS LIFE, HE LIVED A LIFE AT REST. HE LIVED HAVING ENTERED INTO GOD’S REST. THAT REST IS OBVIOUS IN EVERY BELIEVER WHO TRUSTS THE LORD. OF COURSE, FOR ISRAEL AND FOR US THERE ARE BATTLES, BUT IF WE ARE LIVING IN THAT PROMISED REST WE KNOW WE ARE WELL-EQUIPPED TO DEAL WITH THOSE BATTLES. THE ADULT ISRAELITES WHO CAME OUT OF EGYPT BELIEVED IN THE EXISTANCE OF THEIR GOD, BUT DID NOT KNOW HIS WAYS. THEREFORE IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THEM TO BE CONTENT WHILE GOING THROUGH THE TOUGH THINGS GOING ON IN THEIR LIVES. BECAUSE THEY DID NOT KNOW THAT JEHOVAH’S WAYS INCLUDED WELL-PLANNED DIFFICULT TIMES, THEY COULD NOT DEVELOP FAITH IN HIM. BECAUSE THEY DID NOT HAVE FAITH, THEY COULD NOT GO WHERE FAITH WAS REQUIRED. THAT IS, THEY COULD NOT ENTER THE PROMISED LAND. RALPH DID. HE TRUSTED THE LORD, REALIZED GOD’S HAND ON HIMSELF IN THE EASY AND TOUGH TIMES, AND WAS GRANTED ENTRANCE INTO THE SITUATION IN THIS EARTH-LIFE OF OCCUPYING GOD’S PROMISES.

THE ISRAELITES HAD THE SAME SOURCE OF FAITH THAT WE HAVE. WE ARE EACH GIVEN THE PORTION OF FAITH THAT WE NEED. WE CANNOT INCREASE OUR FAITH. THE HEAVENLY DISTRIBUTOR OF FAITH KNOWS WHAT HE IS DOING, SO OUR HAVING OUR LITTLE FAITH IS NO PROBLEM TO HIM.

IT’S DOUBT, NOT “LITTLE FAITH,” THAT PLAGUES US AND BOTHERS GOD. “YOU OF LITTLE FAITH; WHY DID YOU DOUBT?” WHO SAID THAT, AND TO WHOM? IT WAS JESUS TO PETER. PETER HAD ASKED FOR AND RECEIVED JESUS’ WILL, ACTED UPON IT WITH HIS LITTLE FAITH, THEN BEGAN TO DOUBT. DOUBT IS UNCERTAINTY. WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR UNCERTAINTY IN REGARDS TO WHETHER WE WILL FOCUS ON, TRUST AND OBEY HIM. WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN ADEQUATE FAITH FOR ALL OF LIFE’S EVENTS.

FAITH IS THAT WHICH ENCOURAGES US TO OBEY OUR TRUSTWORTHY GOD. IT INCREASES AFTER WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN GOD’S WILL AND HAVE OBEYED HIM. PETER’S “LITTLE FAITH” WAS ENOUGH FOR HIM TO ACT UPON JESUS’ WORD, BUT THEN HE BEGAN TO BE UNCERTAIN. JESUS ASKED HIM, “WHY DID YOU DO THAT?!”

RALPH KNEW THAT THE LORD COULD BE TRUSTED. IT WAS MY OBSERVATION THAT HE LIVED BY WHAT HE KNEW. HIS RESULT: PEACE, SIMPLE OBEDIENCE, PATIENCE WITH THOSE WHO STRUGGLED TO ENTER WITH HIM INTO GOD’S REST, COMPLETENESS, AND SWEETNESS TO GOD.

SWEET RALPH AND SWEET JESUS.

7. I think that you need this Thought about as much as I do, which means you need it. The Lord is not impressed with a lot of things that we tend to focus on, like OUR wealth and possessions. He is impressed by how we steward them for Him. He desires that we be living examples of mercy, justice, humility and obedience. Avoid lying, cheating, and manipulation – which can be very sneaky sins. Be merciful to the needy. Don’t look down on those who are less or have less than you.

The world seems to be full of greed, corruption, dishonesty and injustice. It seems like those sins were less common 50 and 75 years ago. [Yes, my 85 year old mind reaches back to even 82 years ago.] The nations of the world are filled with iniquity and will [soon?] be paying a high price for it. When that time comes we will be lights in the darkness. Some will be so bright that the world will extinguish us. It won’t know any better.

We have so very much history ahead of us that it is sometimes more exciting to look at events ahead than to look back. However, remember this: 1) The ten tribes of God’s people in the Northern Kingdom were defeated and exiled [by Assyria in 722 B.C.], 2) the two tribes of God’s people in the Southern Kingdom were defeated and deported [by Babylon in 606 B.C., 597 B.C., and 586 B.C.], 3) God’s earthly capital, Jerusalem, where He had lived by His Spirit was destroyed in that final defeat [by Babylon in 586 B.C.], and 4) His people were dispersed worldwide and His rebuilt capital and home were destroyed [by the Romans in 70 A.D.].

Why should we recall that brief outline of the Lord working among His people in a certain way? Review 1 Corinthians 10:11 (1-15), Romans 4:23, and 15:4.

8. When someone is said to be immersed in his work we understand that he is thoroughly involved in, committed to, and identified with his work. When a bride is newly married [and even before] she works to become immersed in her husband’s life and person. [If not, she has an unsettled aspect to her life.]

When the waters parted and Israel went through the Sea they were immersed into Moses. They were also led by and under the cloud by day [if they moved with it] and pillar of fire by night [the light of God’s striking and effective presence in their recurrent (God-scheduled) darknesses] every day for 40 years – 1 Cor. 10:2. Being God’s chosen people, and placed into someone [Moses] who was acceptable to God for the circumstances He planned for their lives [see Heb. 3:5-12], He fed them manna [the Bread of Life sent down daily from heaven] and water [the life-giving water from the Rock that was smitten]. We are able to see that history story in our communion services.

“Immersion into” is necessary if important projects are to be accomplished the right way, as the head/Head directs, and on schedule. Along the way, the one who is immersed begins to take on the identity and nature of the one into whom he has been immersed. It happens quicker if the process is voluntary and embraced [emphasis again on our recognition and embracing of “the process” as in Heb. 3:5-12].

Water immersion/baptism is [at least] an external manifestation of a commitment to identify completely and forever with the person, attributes, purposes and programs of the Lord. After that commitment, called discipleship, has been adequately secured we are sent out as ambassadors for Christ, to speak and work in His name and with His authority – John 20:21; 2 Cor. 5:20. We manifest Him and are commissioned to deal with others in Jesus’ name, as did Jesus for His Father – John 17:6-9.

During that process we are also commissioned to speak to our Father “in Jesus’ name,” which is not meant to be a weightless, habitual wording at the end of our prayers, but a proclamation of who we are [the chosen ones of our Father], where we are [abiding together in Christ], doing what we are doing [in the power of the Holy Spirit], saying what we are saying [speaking for Christ], and having God’s results [as He expects of His family members]. It is not a light thing to proclaim to God our Father that we are at least progressively fulfilling all those requirements when we say, “I ask this in Jesus’ name.”

9. When we talk with the Lord it is not for His sake, except in the sense that everything is for His sake. And our conversations with Him are not to inform Him, or to persuade Him. He is not reluctant to do that which is best for His creation [and He will do that which is best], from the majesties of the cosmos down to the smallest subatomic detail – a range of His concern that is certainly meant to encompass everything concerning me, you, and ours. Prayer is to draw us to Him in humility, trust, and submission to His will. When we have grasped [or, have been grasped by] how willing He is to do the perfect thing, further prayer in the matter [and about much else] is unnecessary. Obedience to His will is then only a mop-up operation, while He manifests His lively workmanship.

10. Until recently B. E. had been a self-proclaimed, church-going unbeliever. For years he had prayed one honest prayer every morning: “God, if you are real, show me.” That was a plea, not a challenge. Then he found that he had become a believer, by faith.

Recently, while reading an article about the explosion of Christianity in China, B. E. saw and forwarded the following quote: “There is an enormous struggle across China brought on by the rise of worshipers that seem to really believe.” That’s the sort of Christianity he was looking for during those years of unbelief.

11. Allegories in Scripture are often the most important message of a passage. In John 2:1-11, when Jesus changed water into wine, the event itself was and is a powerful display of God’s power in the Man, Jesus, and was designed to be evidence that He was and is the Messiah.

But the allegory: The wine [always a picture in Scripture of the Holy Spirit] had run out at a wedding celebration. Jesus and His disciples were invited guests. It must have been a wedding of a family acquaintance because Mary was there, also. Simply put, wherever Jesus and His disciples are invited, the latter times/years [of individuals or congregations or denominations or the church in general] will be better than the first. The requirement is the same as Mary said, “Whatever He [Jesus] says to you, do it.” The most common offering [water] will become the best [wine], and lots of it.

12. “Every time I paint a portrait I lose a friend.” – John Singer Sargent [1856-1925], Italian-born American artist, unknown relationship to Christ Jesus. That reminds me of myself and possibly a few others in my juvenile days in the Spirit-led walk, meaning that as soon as some people got a good picture of me they didn’t want anything to do with me. They were probably right. It’s been a process.

13. “We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.” – Maya Angelou [1928-2014], American writer, poet, dancer, actress, singer, fry cook, prostitute, Baptist. As in Thought No. 12, Maya and I and you have been processing. When we see His hand on us, and the way begins to be clearer, and we see some progress, change can be embraced more enthusiastically.

14. I still look at some of the things the Lord has had me do, and tremble at the things that could have happened if He had not done the promised impossible. I marvel at [the human stupidity of] simple faith mixed with God’s faithfulness and all-mightiness. All glory goes to the Lord! Aristotle said, “No great genius has ever existed without some touch of madness.”

15. B. W. says that John Piper [1946-present], American preacher, Baptist said, “Bible reading is not a cure for a bad conscience; it is chemo for your cancer ……We are desperately sick with worldliness and only the Holy Spirit by the Word of God can cure this terminal disease.” I suppose he was speaking to our occasional tendency to go to the Bible, usually the Psalms or the Gospel of John, and seek peace when we have been bad, instead of repenting. That would be the “but God knows my heart,” or “but God loves me anyway” attempt to settle our unsettled souls. A forgiven and cleansed soul is one of the greatest blessings a saint can enjoy. Finding some measure of peace without being cleansed will not approximate it.

16. K. deK. [it’s hard to camouflage that name by using only his initials] commented on Thought No. 10 in December, 2014 THOUGHTS by saying: “I am thinking that even though people think that their religion is private nobody is on an island and their lives are on display [to a measure] for others to see, so their notion of privacy is only in their minds, because they are on public display for others to see the way they behave themselves and thus a display of what they believe.”

Right! As I look back over my life, at all of it but especially a certain part of it, I’m amazed that what I thought I was covering up was instead being displayed. Among those who loved me, some were patient while others helped me face my sin and others simply “supported” me while I healed. The body of Christ was really the body of Christ – loving, revealing, convicting, concealing, counseling, redirecting, and walking with me back onto the Way.

The outcome? “Go and sin no more,” and “As I have given to you, give to others.” That last one means to give freely and of the best stuff. Help yourself.