THOUGHTS OF FEBRUARY, 2019

1. A precaution: When we compromise the truth or spin our behavior and beliefs in times of peace, we are allowing ourselves to be maneuvered into position to go along with the devil when he makes his next move on us. Don’t do that. Seek the truth [be humble], use the whole, direct, and simple truth [filter-out lies], accept the truth [repent], reformulate the truth [renew your mind], and live the truth in fellowship with the Truth [walk in the Spirit].
2. The Lord honors His word above all else of Himself. He hovers over His word to perform it. He never lies. He doesn’t plan to give us feathery beds of ease so that we have no tests or trials. Those difficulties are His plans and are customized for us to prove the value of our trusting Him and His word.

The need for and efficacy of trials is well-established in the natural as well as in the spiritual. Parents, sports coaches, school teachers, the military – all know the need of difficult training to challenge us, to bring us to the end of ourselves, to trust our leaders, and to create teamwork. The process did its good work on us even before we knew it was going on.

1. It is not enough that we give intellectual assent to Jesus being the Lord [even the devil does that], that we agree with what we understand what the Bible says [even the Pharisees of Jesus’ and our day did and do that], and that we follow God’s rules of moral conduct [simple cultural influence does that]. All of those good things are a plus, but Jesus said we “must be born again” which is closely associated with needing to “become as little children” – Matt. 18:3.

Those who don’t understand spiritual things at least understand that to be born again means needing to start over, somehow. When you were born again by the Spirit, you dropped off at least some of your old ways and friends, had a major change in your way of thinking and what you thought about, understood the Bible better, and desired spiritual fellowship. All of that, and more, indicated that you were born again and had become a new person – 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Pet. 1:23. Your old spirit had been replaced by God’s Spirit.

To become a human person, you had been born from your mom’s womb by her and your dad’s physical action; to become a spiritual person you had been born of your Father’s will [John 1:13] when He placed His Spirit in you. Nicodemus tried, but at that time he could not understand it – John 3:4. The church roles have many who do not understand that.

It’s easy to see, by personal experience, observation of others, and study of our new Father’s writings, that we really do have a miraculous, God-given, fresh start in a new life, and that it is in an entirely new kingdom and family. Yet, here we are in our same ‘ole bodies. Our changes may be surprising to others but seem simply normal to us as we think, act and talk new. At times, even the best and most moral old ways are not sufficient for life and growth in our new family.

It takes our new heart, mind and [often] a new environment to receive that which our Father has prepared for us, His newborn ones. The more we trust and obey our Father, the more we see that He rules; in fact, He is always working to prove His universal dominion to us. His kingdom is established and is growing. Nothing can deter Him – Is. 9:6-7. It is the most high God who governs the affairs of man – Dan. 4:34-37.

God is a spirit and we have been made one spirit with Him – 1 Cor. 6:17. That’s much like becoming one body with our spouse. Everywhere we look or turn, the Lord is cleansing and unifying. I have known housewives who were super cleansers and unifiers, but the Lord surpasses them all.

1. This Thought is about “What disturbs your peace?” Warning: That is a simple but tricky question about ouselves so it often gets wrong answers, indicating that we don’t know ourselves. I would say that many of us do not know that it is “me” who causes me to lose my peace. In America we spend much time putting “me” first, but critiquing ourselves is not popular. We prefer to do that about our neighbors. So, we don’t understand ourselves, which results in the loss of truth, the loss of soul-freedom, and the blame-game is on. That leaves us blaming people, things, and situations for our peace-less-ness. Let’s work on that. It is the truth that sets us free, not lies. Caution: The truth may first make us mad.

Is the Lord really the source of all goodness, and the one who stands ready to turn all non-good things to good for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes? The correct answers are, “Yes.” If you answered “Yes,” is this another example of having the correct theology but not believing or living by it? If we live by that correct theology no one could disturb our peace because even the worst event was headed for goodness, even as we were working to correct the problem. [discussion time.] A kindred test question is, “Is Christ divided so that if two or more Christian disciples have a problem , they could settle for being irreconcilable, a stand-off, and go their own ways even if living under the same roof?” [second discussion time,]

So, what is our problem? High-level question: Is it adequate to agree to disagree, formally or informally? Answer: No; but doing that does have value. It shows that we are part of the problem. [another discussion time.] I think the answer can be seen in the “righteous broken nature” of believers who are disciples of Jesus. I say “disciples” because non-disciple believers are still in the process of deciding whether they are going to give their lives to the Lord, obeying His word, doing what Jesus says -- or not.

Non-disciple believers don’t get much of that which the Lord offers us [except to serve Him and go to heaven as non-overcomers, which is such a small part of Jesus’ desire and offer]. Instead, their focus is on what they must get out of Jesus’ life [meaning “require” of Him in return for their limited trust and obedience] at various points in various experiences – or they draw back in variable degrees from discipleship. Giving Jesus that which He deserves because He died for us so we would succeed in “today’s” very encounter is a foggy thought to believers who are not walking in discipleship. If they are not getting what they want for what they put into life, marriage, work, etc., they settle back into their self-designed lives for a more comfortable, self-planned existence.

The process is the filter. We must pass through many times of not having our way, being crushed and re-built, a process in which disciples continue trusting the Lord and become overcomers. Those who have been sufficiently crushed show much of Christ and less of self. When life is working contrary to our desires we will vary in our brokenness, but brokenness is God’s plan and His hands are in that vital process like a cardiac surgeon at work. He works long and hard to bring us to the day when we finally say, “Not my way, but yours, Lord.” If we don’t place our lives and our hearts in His hands, we have chosen to keep our diseased heart and make the most of life. Those who accept the truth of their diseased heart get on the operating table of their custom-made circumstance and trust their Surgeon, thus improving their eternal lives and circumstances. Those who don’t trust their surgeon can keep their very valid, understandable, human reasons, can choose unbelief and disobedience, and relate to evil forces in their own strength. Not good, but we humans do things like that.

Some don’t understand God’s processes and requirements; others rebel against the enlightenment, conviction and help of the Holy Spirit. But those who take up their crosses find the truth of Psalm 46:1-3, 10-11, that the deepest work of God takes place in the hidden, humble heart. Let go of all human effort [not always an easy thing to do unless the trial becomes too much for us].

Put your confidence in the Lord for Him to do that which only He can do. That is the essence of Christian growth. Remember that our lives are spiritual lives, and that the Holy Spirit works supernaturally. We cannot make God’s word work for us – ours is to yield to the One who does His work within us. If Isaiah 28:20 seems to be on “Repeat” in your life, it’s not the problem of the bed or blanket. Talk to the Cardiac Surgeon.

1. In case you missed Sunday School last week, here are a couple of questions for you. No tricks, only direct answers with chapter and verse answers supplied. 1) Why did the Lord send Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to Egypt – Matt. 2:13-15? 2) Why did they live in Nazareth when they returned from Egypt – Matt. 2:19-23? Answers to follow somewhere below in this edition.
2. If you have been part of making an unrighteous person or group successful by unrighteous means, don’t depend on being an ongoing part of that success. You are valuable only as long as needed, then you are fodder. But, if you have been part of making a righteous person or group successful by righteous means, you can depend on being an ongoing part of that success. You are valued for yourself and your service, and you will not be discarded.
3. If you have been lacking a short answer to the question, “What is God about in this world?” consider, “He is bringing all people and things back into perfect order with Him, and He has taken all first steps.” Then talk about the cross and Jesus.
4. Distractions, distractions! Some are obviously bad, others are simply not the best for us [they are on the wayside], and some are not even close to the wayside [not good at all]. To engage with them we must disengage with the Lord, “just a bit” or “only briefly.” Have you heard that whisper?

We would not believe it of ourselves, but we can pray for more of Jesus while holding to things that are less than Jesus. To spend more time with Jesus it is necessary to spend less time with things that are not [or are little] of Jesus. Having more of Jesus can require simply not spending time “away” from Him. Simple, isn’t it. That’s why you are hearing it from me.

If you have difficulty seeing the difference between things of the Lord, things less of the Lord, and things not of the Lord, ask Him for help – Heb. 4:12-13. Or, but secondarily, ask another saint for help.

1. The purpose of civil and family government [all “governing authority”] is two-fold: 1) to put fear into the hearts of evil doers by threat of punishment, and 2) to be an encourager of righteousness and of a clear conscience. That’s Romans 13:1-7. The structure and power of earthly power is necessary due to the nature of fallen mankind.
2. Hold on. This Thought has to do with the deceptiveness of a common street drug’s use. There is a big push for the legalization of the recreational use of marijuana. And many states have done so.

The use of marijuana is but another step in the direction of ungodliness. Its promotion as a harmless pleasure is entirely wrong, meant to deceive us. As a matter of fact, and it has taken years to counter the publicity of the drug culture, it causes psychotic disorders like schizophrenia, violent disruptions, a great increase of pain over time [perhaps lessening of pain initially, although too weak to be a good painkiller initially], leads to other drug use [three times as likely to require opiates three years later], worsens severe mental illnesses [especially psychosis (breaks from reality)], leads teenagers into schizophrenia [the most devastating psychotic disorder] by a factor of three compared to non-users, and its use is soaring.

Today the potency of marijuana has increased from less than 2% THC [the chemical responsible for its psychoactive effects] in the 1970s, to 20% to 25%, due to better farming and cloning techniques, as well as to a demand by users for a stronger high more quickly. To grasp that fact, compare the difference between near-beer and grain alcohol. No wonder that crime among schizophrenics who smoke marijuana is going up, despite the fact that most people with mental illness are not violent.

People with paranoia are especially susceptible to extreme violence when using marijuana. Reports that states that have legalized marijuana are seeing decreases in violent crime are wrong! The opposite is true. The first four states to legalize marijuana have had an increase of 37% in murders and aggravated assaults, stats adjusted for various factors.

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1. Much is being said and done about “draining the swamp” in Washington, D. C. and beyond. At the helm of that work is the Holy Spirit. His is both the brains and the brawn and His leadership is being fleshed-out in people, as is the enemy’s resistance to these workings being spread among others.

Have you noticed the something that is being missed, at least in the news media that I enjoy? That is that another swamp is being drained simultaneously and that this other drainage work was started before the D. C. swamp work. That simultaneous swamp draining is in the church which, as I have mentioned on several occasions, had fallen into the hands of the church [like the D. C. swamp had fallen into the hands of D. C.].

We should have noticed before now that when various types of human swamps need to be drained, the Lord first drains the adulterous church’s swamp [1 Pet. 4:17], because as goes the church, so goes its ambient society. That being so, have we recognized the most recent Holy Spirit workings for our [the church national and local, and your and my] cleansing?

Let’s go back to the beginnings of the church. Consider the outpourings of the Holy Spirit during the past 2,000 years, which was the Lord evangelizing His church, showing His non-acceptance of our forms of Christian Religiosity, and His desire for us to return to the very religion of the apostles. What have been those workings, and what has been the response of the church and of us?

Those events have been called by various names; Holy Spirit revivals, Holy Spirit outpourings, Holy Spirit renewals, plus [by others] times of satanic heresy and apostacy. They are not well documented during the first 1,500 years of the church, but much better recorded in the past 500 years. In America during the early 1900s came the outpouring that established the Pentecostal Denominations, then the two [actually one] outpourings called the Jesus’ Movement and the Charismatic Renewal. There were others around the world. If you are informed by literature or personal experience, you know that every Holy Spirit outpouring was rejected by the already-established churches, who had been themselves established by a Holy Spirit outpouring and been opposed by the established Religionists of their day.

It seems that the Lord poured out His Spirit on individuals, small groups, larger groups, and very large groups for “renewal” of biblical Christianity. As said previously, He was evangelizing us, working to remove us from our many forms of Christian Religiosity, to show His ability to restore us to biblical spirituality for life and worship. That happened each outpouring, always to a variable and limited extent, tastes of Acts 2. In our days, the shame of the different, separated denominations is being displayed openly. You notice that each has been reluctant to repent.

1. The Lord knows not only the end from the beginning, He also designed the end from the beginning, including every step in between. Like Abraham “saw” part of God’s eternal design [Heb. 11:10], God saw and sees the whole/entire/complete/total scheme of creation from eternity past to eternity future. He wonderfully let Abraham [and others, like us] get peeps at that which already is “done.” When we say, “In Christ it is done,” that is an absolute. It has not been yet experienced in the natural, but it is currently completed in the spiritual, which is the realm of the only reality.
2. Let’s review a partial list of events that are to precede the [soon coming] Tribulation: 1) The rebirth of Israel [Ezekiel 36-37]. 2) An increase of knowledge and travel [Dan. 12:4]. 3) The breakdown of morality along with the apostacy [2 Tim. 3:1-5; 2 Thess. 2:3]. 4) Development of mark of the Beast technologies [Rev. 13:15-18]. 5) An increase of great earthquakes and other natural disasters [Luke 21:11; Mark 13:3-8]. 6) Wars and rumors of wars [Matt. 24:6]. 7) The rise of globalism [Dan. 7:23-24]. And 8) the coming destruction of Russian-Islamic forces that invade Israel in the War of Gog and Magog [Ezek. 38-39].
3. Answers to questions in Thought No. 5 above: 1) To fulfill His word as spoken through Hosea 11:1. 2) To fulfill His word as spoken many times through the prophets. “To fulfill His word” was and is the intent of God in all things. Trust Him. The fulfillment of His word is often not as we would have imagined. Many of the Old Testament faithful must have thought that the Messiah would be an Egyptian [since He would be called out of Egypt, and others that he would be a Nazarene [one who never cut his hair, never drank alcoholic beverage, etc. as required of those who took the oath of a Nazarene in the Old Testament]. But the Lord fulfilled His word in various ways other than the first-thought obvious. Be careful to not box-in the Lord by trying to hold Him to His word as it seems He should at first blush.
4. Jesus had a select group of believers with Him that day. They were all Israelites. Some had been with Him for hours, days, or months. Some were already labeled officially as His disciples, and had left all to be with Him full-time, long-term. All were God-believers; top-of-the-line folks. Of the many things they believed, there were two prominent ones that were challenged that day – God’s people were not to drink blood or eat human flesh. When animals were sacrificed [offered up] to God He wanted none of its blood, so the animal was first drained of its blood. Likewise, when they slaughtered an animal to be eaten by themselves, the blood was first drained. They wanted none of its blood. And they ate no human flesh.

So, on that day [John 6:48-58] the believers were having a hard time with His message, the central point being that they were to drink His blood and eat His body. Many, even of His disciples, left Him [v. 66]. They did not understand Him although that which He said, He said clearly. Do you think Jesus made a preaching blunder? Was He unaware of the effects of His sermon topic? No, I think not. He knew His audience and was preaching exactly what His Father wanted, and He did not explain Himself for their sakes, deliberately. That was asking for trouble, was it not? It certainly thinned the crowd. Then He “invited” the twelve to consider leaving Him, also. That sort of preaching brings the worst and the best out of the congregation. One thing it did was thin them down from being doctrinally controlled to being Holy Spiritly controlled. Many Christians cannot tolerate that sort of orientation and relationship, both between them and man, and between them and God.

Loosen up, hold onto that which is good, listen to the Lord

1. In the early 1700s, that which is now known as the state of Georgia [named after King George II of England], was a high-minded Anglican colony. As such, it had four distinctive features, which were the prohibition of slavery, rum, lawyers, and Roman Catholics. You can see, our being on this side of the calendar, that those features were destined to fall, which they did.

What was up? Why those prohibitions? Answers: 1) Slavery [Indian, at first], because of the equality of humanity, although slavery of black Africans was allowed later for economic reasons and because of their human “inequality;” 2) Rum, because “sickness and death were noted to result from rum drinking;” 3) Lawyers, because Georgia was to be “free from that pest and scourge of mankind called lawyers;” and 4) Roman Catholics because of the strongly established separation of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism in England. By the way, Jews were allowed because the King’s charter allowed religious freedom for all non-Roman Catholics. The Roman Catholic Church was not far away in Spanish Florida.

No doubt that you can shoot holes in all four prohibitions, based on our 300 years of “human progress” and your knowledge of God’s will through the Bible and His indwelling Holy Spirit. So, what to say about their condition? It is easy to get the historical facts mostly straight, but not so easy to get into the condition of the minds and lives at that time, including their knowledge of scripture and the condition of the available church. The Lord, who cautions us regarding judging others, extends His caution to us regarding those of other generations and centuries. They may have been given much less to work with than we have been given, so we should be graceful, as He has been and is graceful. More is expected of those to whom more has been given, and less is expected of those to whom less has been given.

1. I was raised to tolerate what people said with, “I disapprove what you say, but will defend your right to say it.” Today’s tolerance has changed to intolerance: “I disapprove of what you say, therefore you may not say it.”
2. What is a sign that we want the Lord’s life but want to have some of our own life, also? It shows like this: “We have ups and downs simply because we still love our lives and only trust in His life during the really difficult moments. In our really bad times we throw ourselves upon His life and He carries us on through. But in our normal everyday situations we live according to our own lives. The answer: Live only one life – His.
3.