THOUGHTS OF MARCH, 2020

1. C. B. has provided March, 2020’s best definition of an overcomer: “One who demonstrates the preeminence of Christ in all things.” But, the more a definition is boiled down to its essence, the less descriptive or elaborative it is. Definitions therefore can be brief or descriptive, both of which serve purposes. “The preeminence of Christ in all things” says it all in compact form but, sure enough, the Lord through John has provided an extended definition for our broader understanding, living, and [only then] fullest enjoyment.

John said that Jesus, to whom the Father has given the honor of and responsibility for judging all things, will decide who among all believers will be labeled “Overcomers.” Through John the Revelator we have a good picture of what it takes to become one of those humble elite. See:

1. Rev. 2:7 – Zeal and perseverance in Jesus, as when He was our first love.
2. Rev. 2:11 – Faithfulness in and through persecution, unto death.
3. Rev. 2:17 – Avoidance of deviant teachings, such as shady teachings to achieve desired results, and separation of believers into priesthood [clergy] and laity to preserve truth.
4. Rev. 2:26-28 – Adherence to biblical teachings of orderliness among believers, especially women in submission and obedience to men.
5. Rev. 3:5 – Maintaining a living faith while not resting on our good works.
6. Rev. 3:12 – Perseverance in the Great Commission.
7. Rev. 3:21 -- Holding to godly purity while not succumbing to ambient worldly pleasures.
8. Rev. 21:7 – Those who thirst for the spring of the water of life that comes by grace alone.

Although eternal life is a gift to all who lay their lives into Jesus Christ, there is more life for living available for those who will not come short of God’s grace [that convicts me] in our everyday lives. It appears that now and here in our everyday living is the arena where overcoming is offered and the prize won, where our faith is being examined by the world – in our driving, in the grocery line, and in the workplace. That’s why moms excel in the hearts and memories of their children – they are closely examined for years and found to be overcomers.

But don’t get the wrong picture. God is not establishing a new order of sainthood that is not accessible to the rest of us. He is calling us all to accept the same great and precious promises that He offers to everyone who is in Christ, the one Foundation that is already, firmly and finally laid – 1 Cor. 3:11.

Before we leave the Thought, the status of an overcomer may be reached when obedience to God and His word becomes a joy, obedience being “the crown and honor of all virtue” – Martin Luther.

1. God is a spiritual being [not a natural being]. He had the Bible written in natural, human language(s) because He wanted to begin communicating with fallen natural humans, which necessarily left Him expressing Himself inadequately in the natural and incompletely in the spiritual – a beginning necessity, considering the situation. It was like He talked baby talk to us at first.

The natural mind was and is limited in knowing and understanding the Lord’s mind. He and His intents must be understood in spiritual ways by spiritual minds. Therefore, His plan includes giving much of humanity of His Spirit so His recipients can understand His written word and drink deeply from His waters -- 2 Tim. 3:16-17.

But, much of the Bible can indeed be understood by the natural, human mind [its history, geography, religious theology, etc.]. That helps, but its spiritual understanding and depth can be understood only by the spiritual mind – 1 Cor. 2:14 (2:6-3:3). He has made Himself available by the Spirit so we can live in and by the Spirit and know Him [not only about Him], not being limited by the limitations of our human spirit.

The natural mind cannot even understand or appreciate what I have just now said. When Paul got to chapters 12, 13, and 14, his spiritual writings more easily show the truth of the matter, that spirit and flesh/natural mind are incompatible even though they are reading the same material – God’s printed word. There are entire denominations that reject or neglect those spiritualities – gifts of the Holy Spirit to believers so that we may be whom He wants us to be in this life and the next, and worship Him as He wants to be worshipped.

So, when Jesus said His Father was seeking those who would worship Him in spirit and truth, does that mean He is seeking you? Or are you satisfied with worshipping Him at a “wonderful level of human understanding?” [God is not!] Do you see and live the difference in your worship, prayers, Bible reading, and work?

1. In John 12:32 Jesus said, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men [peoples -- ed.] to Myself.” That is tremendous, is it not? Let’s look at what it says. The I AM is pointing to something central, that He will not lift Himself up [will not exalt Himself but will be humbled unto the death of Himself]. The “if” indicates that He knew He would not always be lifted up by the church, even though He is the only way, life, and word.

As I indicated above, it looks like the “all men” means “all peoples.” But the most outstanding thing to me this day is that He said He will draw people to Him. There is no pushy compulsion, no threats -- only attraction. He patiently waits for green fruit to ripen. To the ripe fruit, in His time, He will be irresistible. Teachers, parents, and churchmen who deal with souls know that waiting for fruit to ripen takes patience, endurance -- a willingness to love from afar the Sauls of Tarsus who persecute Him, the church.

But the ripened fruit are worth the wait. If the church will follow Him in lifting Him up and being lifted up, not compelling or attracting through the many carnal [though not sinful] ways that can be used, that will help in the development of Christ’s wonderful church.

1. The believer’s road to maturity is, surprisingly, named “Despair of Myself.” This must really anger the devil, because he lost us when we were born again, and the “Despair of Myself” road was to be his best detour, his Plan B. But it quickly made a right turn into “God’s Way.” When the devil was doing his “best,” he began getting his worst.

The word to us is to not try to make ourselves like Jesus [you knew that]. We are the Lord’s workmanship, not ours, but some of us never learn the difference, or are forgetful when the action begins. Learn to depend on your weaknesses and failures as being the road to spiritual growth, like did Paul, so your testimony also can be, “When I am weak, I am among the strong and wise” [paraphrased from 1 Cor. 1:26-31 and 2 Cor. 12:9-10 – ed.]. I’m not talking about being soft on sin, but of knowing that there is no condemnation for you, that another “all things” has just happened to you, and that it is in the process of being turned to good – Rom. 8:28. In Matthew 26:75, Peter was in the process of learning that vital lesson, and I know it was painful on his flesh. [Right?]

So, the Lord is in no way surprised when we fail. Nothing surprises Him, because He knows all things in advance. Neither can He be disappointed, because to be disappointed one must be dependent on having to have something done how, when or where, and be frustrated when otherwise happens. That’s not the Lord. Although He has feelings – righteous ones, they are pure and are perfectly controlled. That’s a lesson for us who are going to be like Him [remember?].

The Lord is patient, so He is waiting [biding His time as the necessary plans work out]. He made us weaker than Him, told us to be perfect like Him, added failure and despair to our feeling resources, tossed a necessary dose of faith into each growth encounter, and now watches, sprinkling grace on us as we choose the reduction of ourselves in order to have room for Jesus to be formed in us. He relishes the sweet-smelling aroma like a cook relishes cookies in the oven. The aroma gets especially delightful when we trust Him in our failures.

Remember that our spirit is willing but our flesh is weak, and that our Creator made us this way, on purpose. Nancy’s favorite word of counsel to the despairing ones at this point is, “So What!” The Lord is the workman and He knows how to get His job done. Our weaknesses are no trouble to Him, but our unwillingness to acknowledge our weaknesses and to face Him makes the process more painful and causes delays – only pain and delay, not rejection – but He will finish His work in us. Victory is ahead. This is to say that there is no need to pull that tooth slowly and with no anesthetic. Do it His way. Love is a great anesthetic.

1. I did not want to put this Thought in Thought No. 4, because I did not want to weaken the point of No. 4. But hear this; Don’t look at yourself only as an unfinished work! We are also a finished, a completed work. We are looking here at two proper perspectives, on each believer, by One Person [who wants us to fully grasp both of His perspectives]. The perspective here is a common one, being like the long-term “finished” perspective of the proud parent of a newborn, the experienced educator of a new class of students, and the master architect as he views his first sketch of his future skyscraper.

When the Holy Spirit says things like; 1) we are complete in Jesus [Col. 2:10] and 2) we are the righteousness of God in Christ [2 Cor. 5:21], He means we “are home,” not “on the way home.” On the first hand, the point of Thought No. 4 was that we are on the way home and are in good hands that can and will accomplish the end product [our sanctification]. Jesus said that only God is good, so we can say that only God’s hands are good [perfectly capable unto the impeccable completion of His fullest intents]. We already knew that human hands cannot make us like Jesus. On the other hand, this Thought No. 5 is that we are already there because we are already in Him, in God Himself, in whose hands and mind and heart we rest in our souls until He is finished with us.

The truth is that we will be no more complete in Him later than we were the day we were born again. Yes, when we look at the condition of our souls compared with Jesus’ soul, we are not God’s finished product, we are not yet complete. But when we look at ourselves through God’s eyes [the lens of scripture helps], we will never be more complete than we are now. It is the will and purpose of God that Jesus Christ be all in all, that we be conformed to the image of Jesus. In the grand scheme of things, as Jesus said, “It is finished.” Find your resting place there, and submit to the Workman.

1. While resting in that special place, and submitting to the Workman, there will be well-placed challenges, even fiery ones, to both our resting and submitting [surprise!]. Challenges are part of His plan. We already know that the greatest lessons are not learned in the classroom or by one’s private readings. They are learned through His perfectly tailored trials and tribulations in the lives of those who want to be like Jesus, so we walk the way of Jesus.

If you want to think of God as “allowing” those challenges, go ahead and think that way. But the Lord is much more of a director than would be an allower. He is deliberate. He does all things well and with aforethought. You know that you are under the continual eye of the Lord, and completely in His loving hand, so how can we not trust that we are under His direction and in His hand. Those things that may be thought of as allowances are His plans.

1. Another A. H. testimony: “When I was a young man, and a very young Christian, my father asked me to weed the rose garden. Although I was healthy, gardening was probably my least favorite task. Before becoming a Christian, I would rather have spent my energy on something like an exciting round of golf [exciting?], but ‘Honor your father and mother’ rang in my heart. I chose to obey the heavenly prompt, and off I went to the garden.

“It seemed like a large patch to me, but was only about 30 feet by 30 feet. It was indeed a rose garden, but after many months of neglect it was overgrown without a rose bush in sight. I waded into the chest-high weeds to start what to me seemed like an impossible task. I started with the largest offenders, pulling them out by their roots. This had next to no effect after the first pass as it only revealed what seemed like even more intermediate height weeds.

After the second pass, the tops of the rose bushes began to show through; even some rose flowers showed. More weeding later it began to resemble a rose bed but there were still weeds short to the ground. At this point my father took pity on me and took charge of the remainder now that the problem was under control.

The Lord spoke to my heart, saying, ‘This is you. Your life was a weed garden choking my roses. It is now a rose garden with some weeds. It needs ongoing attention.’ I was delighted with that word then, as I am now. There are still some weeds to go.”

Reading A. H.’s writings is to me like looking into a mirror.

1. I’m sure that you have noticed that fear is stalking the land. Personal and world economies are shaking. Distress and perplexity abound, men’s hearts fail them because of things that are happening and could happen, and it has probably knocked on your door – Luke 21:25-26. It reminds me of the night of the first Passover in Egypt, as faithful Israelites were protected by the blood of the lamb on their doorposts [only if they abided in their abodes], while all other families [Israelite, Egyptian or other] suffered the loss of their firstborn.

You could make a long list of our current fear-causing situations with the current chief being the coronavirus. Number two would probably be the stock market. Godly fear moves us closer to the Lord. Common fear can neutralize a person or nation so that nothing effective can be done about the situation, or it can drive us to mistakes and excesses of response. The worse basic thing it can do is distract us from the truth, that being that the Lord is the Lord and we can trust Him while we are doing what should and can be done.

But notice in those Luke 21 verses that the powers of heaven shall be shaken. That does not refer to God’s third heaven, but to the ungodly spiritual powers of the devil in the first [atmosphere] and second [space] heavens who are nearing their end and are losing their grip on the Lord’s people as the Lord moves forward with His plans to restore all things. He is making His chosen ones to be like His Son Jesus. Remember that God’s plan is to bring all creation into submission to Jesus. In this age He is bringing [birthing] many into sonship, the first step of making us like Jesus.

That process required the replacement of the angels, who were referred to as “sons of God” until humanity began to replace them as such. One-third of the angels did not appreciate their demotion, so rebelled and were forcibly removed from their angelic position. The other two-thirds had the humility and love to go with God’s plan, and are still at work for Him and us.

Back to the topic of fright. Recognize when you are under attack and stay “in your blood-protected house” [your active faith and abiding in Christ] all night [through this time of darkness]. You have eaten of the Passover Lamb [been born again of the Spirit of God]. Be ready to go [to act obediently faithfully] when the night is over. In every case, the night will be over. Do the obvious and simple things, and totally resign your life into the Lord’s active care – 2 Tim. 1:12. In short, observe your current Passover, Christian.

1. I have often thought and taught that it would be great to live in a residential community of Pharisees, as long as I measured up to their standards. They take great care of their yards, pets, and houses, discipline their kids, and have multiple other good neighbor appreciances. I would be under their close scrutiny, but could probably stand it. They would be under lots of grace from me, although they may not need it in regards to outward performance.

In Matthew 5:20 Jesus said that unless our righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Knowing that our entering into that kingdom is of utmost importance to all of us, it is good to think about it from time to time, as if entering into and staying in were different topics [I suppose it is not, but continuing to meet the entrance requirements after being permanently accepted is a worthy ongoing consideration]. And besides, the whole trouble of man is his inherent tendency to travel a path that is independent of his creator. There is a distance between the time of the Lord’s act of making us born again and the time of our being able to truthfully say, “The devil has nothing in me that he can use to get an advantage.”

We know that we should and want to forsake our outright, obvious, and biblically-listed sins [that’s what we consider the really bad stuff], but what about this matter of forsaking or improving upon our righteousness? When we became Christians, were not our good behaviors and habits approved by the Lord to be used as building blocks for more and better righteousness? Yes, and No. Some were fine but needed continual improvement; others were flimsy and fragile or worse so needed to be replaced. But that’s not Jesus’ point.

The picture of being born again and presented to the Lord for the perfection of that which we already are is not accurate or adequate for our entering into the long-range life. The accurate picture is that once we are born again the old person is dead, and everything we brought to Him is junk to us. The new man is a new person, a new creation. When we presented ourselves to the Lord for salvation [or, when we were dragged up before the Lord to be saved], we might have thought it was for cleaning up our lives, but He called us to lay down our lives, die to our selves [our self-determination and self-construction], and live in Him as He lives in us.

There is really an outstanding difference between a) keeping what we were for the purpose of improving it and b) junking all that we were for the purpose of being made entirely new, because b) involves more than forsaking our wrong stuff and asking for right stuff. It goes to our roots, to death to our old self, not only to certain of our behavior called “bad.” When we see that, and agree to die to our old self in order to live as an entirely new person, He is able to make progress in our souls. [Compare this to a child who is adopted into your family, and has to make a decision on whether he wants to remain like he was in his old family, or to become like he really is a new person in your family.] The Lord wants to and is able to crucify the formerly good and thought-to-be-good stuff along with the acknowledged bad stuff.

But isn’t that also the story of growing up in the natural – forsaking baby goodness for youth goodness when we are no longer babies, then for adolescent goodness when we are no longer youths, then for adult goodness when we are no longer adolescent? It is a similar picture. Our parents and older siblings told us to stop acting like a baby, to take on more mature behavior because our “newing” [not “renewed”] nature called for it.

So, cleaning up our behavior is not the basic and essential truth and process. Laying down our lives is the truth, and it makes a great difference in the process and our outcomes, considering it decides whether we enter the kingdom – Remember Matthew 5:20. We must learn to hate our thoughts and ways [and families and nations – Luke 14:25-35] that we may gain His thoughts and ways [and family and kingdom]. Although we certainly do need a bath [external cleansing] and frequent re-bathing [for our and other walkers’ sakes], we needed to be made into a new creation and placed in a new kingdom – which the Lord did for us 100% on His own. Now, will we remain dead to the old man and alive in Christ alone? The way is to take up our cross daily and follow Him, not in promising to be better tomorrow.

Now the application, which is where life and death, pleasure and pain are, is as follows. How much of a Pharisee are we? A Pharisee was/is a God-believer who focuses on getting clean on the outside and relating to himself and to others on the basis of external actions and appearances, which is thought to be accomplished through self-efforts. Condemning judgment comes when other persons cannot accomplish “that which **I** did – righteousness” [self-righteousness]. Jesus said we have to get beyond that type of judgment and self-righteousness, or we will remain a Pharisee looking at the kingdom from the outside, having a wonderful and beautiful level of religiosity, killing spiritual life wherever we find it, within ourselves and in others. Don’t do that. Be Jesus.

1. While we are on the subject of something like “Christian, Know Yourself,” let’s look at:
2. Isaiah 42:14-25, wherein the Lord speaks of leading the blind who should be able to see [but cannot], and the deaf who should be able to hear [but cannot]. These are His servants, His messengers, but obviously cannot get or give His word straight. They feel at peace with Him because of their [self-caused] blindness and deafness, but they are in trouble with Him. Their lives and nation are a mess, they will not listen to Him, so He poured out His anger on them, and yet they paid no attention.
3. Jeremiah 5, wherein the Lord says He is bringing an empire against His people who will devour and demolish them because they have eyes that do not see [but they say they see] and have ears that do not hear [but they say that they hear]. Even now you can hear Jesus quoting Jeremiah, and certain of our religious friends who are doing the same.
4. Ezekiel 12, wherein the Lord says His people are a rebellious house because they say they see but do not see, and say they hear but do not hear.
5. Zephaniah 1:17 wherein the Lord says His people have sinned, so He will bring blindness upon them, plus trouble, distress, destruction, desolation, darkness and gloom.
6. Matthew 13, wherein Jesus quoted the above oracles, telling His disciples that their opened eyes and ears were blessed to see and hear His ministry, God’s putting the end to the time of ignorance for those whose hearts were open to Him.

Yet, still in our time, in segments of that which is called the church, we find those whose minds [eyes and ears] are closed to the truth, power, and life of the gospels. When they say they see and understand but don’t, if they were truly physically blind and deaf, they would have no sin; but since they physically see and hear but are blind spiritually, their sin remains with them – John 9:41.

1. It doesn’t happen often, but occasionally is too often. No one likes to be cheated. It’s a violation of social and economic relationships. I’m not talking about simple mistakes, but deliberate cheating, being targeted to your disadvantage, having something taken from you by deception, being lied to concerning something tangible, suffering loss at the hands of a scheming person or company. It is related to and leaves the same scars as does theft.

In Colossians 2:8 our solicitous brother Paul still warns us about being cheated. Let’s listen to him: “See to it that no one takes you captive [cheats you, carries you off, spoils you] through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.” Notice how deceptive cheating can be. It can have a good face, smooth and kindly words, persuasive and benevolent reasoning, moral correctness, and be exalting or fulfilling to you personally. Wow! Isn’t that what all of us want in our religion, in a church where we go with our families, hopefully loaded with years or generations of solid record [traditions], having wonderful ambience and music and a noted social program?

What I want you to see is that all of that can be exactly what Paul was warning us about. To be cheated we have to look at the product, evaluate it, like it, approve it, and pay the price before experiencing the truth of it. Church wise, the clarification comes [if it comes] when we see that it is not according to Jesus Christ. Is that too high of a standard for us to actually life by? If it does not flow from Him, does not have His spiritual power and life, and does not point to Him above all other purposes, we are being cheated.

The whole deal may not appear to be obviously bad, because its better parts are designed to entice us into the deal. The Bible by the Holy Spirit is loaded with wisdom and practicalities. It not only leads us to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, but also opens our eyes and ears to the truth, shows us deceptions, corrects our ways before we fall, and trains us for the straighter, upward path – 2 Tim. 3:13-17. Stay in the Word; live it.

1. How could they possibly have believed Him when He said, “I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away” – John 16:7. It was less a matter of obstinate disbelief than it was lack of information due to their level of training. They had been given bits and chunks of information, but it was not tied together to form **THE** one picture. That tying would need a crucifixion, a collapse of all of their expectations and aspirations, a resurrection and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, plus more time in advanced service.

Wow, no wonder they did not believe it would be to their advantage for Him to go away! Why? It can be confidently said that at that point God did not plan for them to understand. Many things Jesus said and did were planned for their later understanding, for those who continued with Him and in the Spirit.

It is the same with us. As early-on we are beckoned to the Lord, we began to understand [to “see”] and accept things we read and are taught in the Bible, but it does not all make sense or call us to bear our crosses with joy and devotion. As said in Thought No. 2, at that point and in that condition, we can grasp the Bible’s history, geography and theology with our natural minds, but the spiritualities have little or no impact on us until we are reborn of the Spirit, until the Lord puts of Himself into us. Then begins the real learning. Spiritual things must be understood by the Spirit – 1 Cor. 2:14.

So, the disciples had a considerable advantage over us because of their special pre-Christian years, didn’t they. Or did they? They had Jesus with them for three plus years, and we had and now have “only” the church [and the Holy Spirit], which has a high degree of variability from time to time and place to place – certainly in regards to being like and with Jesus.

Yes, that is a vast difference, but it is the God-granted, well-planned grace for our church age, the Teacher’s arranged classroom for us to come to and grow in Christ. We take what we are given, and grow with it. For us, as for the disciples [John 16:5-15], it is difficult to believe the reverse, that our position is more advantageous than that of the pre-cross disciples who had Jesus in person. And it is perfect, or He would have done otherwise with us.

Why more advantaged or perfect? Because it requires more faith – more active submission, unity, “work” for us and more pleasure for the Lord. Those who believe without seeing are more blessed than those who believe by seeing – John 20:29. The disciples were taught by Jesus; later they were taught by the Holy Spirit, as are we. To the extent that we are taught [and changed] by the Holy Spirit, our self-centeredness is decreased and Christ is increased in us. That’s God’s purpose being worked out in us – bringing many sons into the likeness of Jesus.

Spiritual growth is impossible apart from the Spirit. We can get more religious and very christianoid, but have no real growth in the Lord without the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

1. Love of the truth is becoming more scarce. Everyone wants what he wants, including wanting his own truth/way to believe. That describes humanism, which is the basic mindset for socialism – man finding his own way through society’s machinations, supposing that since he has the knowledge of good and evil, and if given [or he takes] enough power, he can arrange life’s factors and produce a good society. Along the way, any toleration of religion is only of those religions that submit to humanism, which is what much of that which is called Christianity is doing today.

But, that’s not antireligious thinking on socialism’s part. It’s a truly religious thinking. It says that man is the highest authority in the universe – very religious. Of course, that is a lie. It is a social delusion that, as it is constructed, leads to chaos, the natural result of believing, “You will be like God.” Adam and Eve believed it, and so do multi-millions of their descendants. In a couple of generations the nation under socialism is impoverished; in another generation, it is in chaos. One way to prevent such a speedy decline is to allow a well-controlled amount of social freedom and humanistic typical religion – but only well-controlled amounts which will not have the power to contest political socialism’s despotism and destruction.

1. Our heavenly Father sent His heavenly Son into the world to round up those earthly creatids destined for salvation, for being made into the likeness of His eternal Son, Jesus. It is amazing how the ongoing round up is producing such a varied and mixed people, all having one common, developing characteristic – they are able to worship the Father in spirit and in truth. That quality of worship simply flows out of them.

God is Spirit. Each born again son of God has of His Spirit, therefore those who worship Him have the ability and desire to worship Him in spirit and truth – John 4:23-24. I suppose that if we have personal worship in spirit and truth, it will also show corporately. Perhaps the matter is a question: What is worshipping in spirit and truth? Everyone who really cares supposes that spirit and truth describes their worship. Perhaps it does? If so, let it show abundantly. Our Father is looking for the results of having sent His Son to us, and worshipping Him in spirit and truth is one of the evidences.

1. Have you stood by and waited for the Lord to speak to or deal with a person or situation? And waited; and waited? Yes, you have. We can neither speed up nor slow down the Lord’s working by fretting or pushing. But it is a joy to stand by, then hear or see the Lord speak to and successfully deal with a problem, to bring His project to another stage of completion. When that happens, we get a taste of that which John the Baptist enjoyed in John 3:29. We had stood by and finally had a time of rejoicing when God’s deed was done. Our joy was made full.

Yes, this week my joy was made full after awaiting the Lord’s work in a dear one for 40 years. In tears of joy and sadness she related her testimony, of how the Lord spoke to her, even quoting Him, and how she was changed by the hearing of His voice. My joy was made full. My response; first, joy, listening and affirmation, then, “Now go do what He said for you to do.”

1. Do you want more of the Lord’s life and power? Then do what He tells you to do. The problem that presents to our flesh is that He tells us to do things that diminish us, costly things that frighten our flesh, despite our spirit cheering us onward in obedience. There is strong, intelligent and “wise” opposition to obedience. We have our lives that we want to live and the “we” wants to be “we.” It’s both a sad and wonderful thing that we don’t have to obey God to be a Christian. There is a tremendous amount of religious flack against discipleship.
2. First it made common sense in a factual way, then a more personal sense year by year, then it took on a deeper meaning like deep calling to deep. It’s a simple statement: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.” The Son of God, from eternal past to eternal future, made known personally to each of us as Jesus of Nazareth, our Lord, is from whom all things of God are initiated and in whom all things of God find their purpose, meaning and reason for being. Everything began and begins in Christ Jesus and everything ends in Him. He, the Person, is the Beginning and is the End and the all Between the Beginning and the End.

In addition to that mind-expanding, life-changing introduction to His reality, our brother Paul wrote that he had one purpose – to know Him. To experience intimacy with Jesus our Lord completes the fulness of Life that is offered us here in this, our current life situation with its pleasures and trials. Things and religiosity are discarded as we focus wholly on Jesus. When we lack a clear focus on Him, we incorporate religious acts, words and things into whatever our measure we have of the truth, producing distracting religion and denominations. That is like leaving the simplicity of Jesus and going back to Moses.

1. Having been united with Jesus in a death like His [having entered the gate, being born again], we are heirs of the resurrection [given the way, the walk, to start of fleshing-out His life that is within us]. Because we therefore share in His death, we will share in His life with the opportunity to start now. Branches that abide on the Vine will have the same life as the Vine had and has.

As long as the Vine and the branches are one, we show forth the glory and the suffering, bear the same fruit, and receive the same rewards afterward. “If we endure, we will also reign with Him” – 2 Tim. 2:12(a). But if we will not walk the walk, we will not reign with Him – 12(b). Notice that the consequences of not walking the walk is not rejection and hell, but not reigning with Him. The purpose of Christ’s cross was to bring salvation to us [which all believers into Jesus have]; then the purpose of our bearing our cross is to manifest the fullest possible amount of His life now during the time of our earth life.

1. Jesus is not reluctant to share His reign with those who will follow Him, but will not reign with those who say they believe in Him but will not take up their crosses and follow Him – that would be calling Him Lord but not doing what He says. Why do that?! Who would do such a foolish thing?! Is it I?
2. As the last Thought for March, I want you, all of you being faithful and loving eternal brothers and sisters in the Lord, to be informed that Nancy, my dear wife of almost 68 years, is physically low. She is tired, weak, aged, thin, uncomfortable, unable to walk or care for herself, has moderate dementia and multiple other serious conditions, and is ready to lay her current body down and go to be with the Lord. She is a loving wife, mother, grandmother (etc.) and child of the Lord. She has been fruitful, full and real. We have grandchildren who have grandchildren. Her sons bless her and love her greatly. She is ready to go Home and seems to be ripe for it. If this is His time to take her, we will cooperate with sadness and thanksgiving.

A note from any of you I will read to her.

 In Christ,

 Bob, and for Nancy