THOUGHTS OF OCTOBER, 2015

1. There is a significant difference between doing no harm to others and doing them good. The first calls for tolerance and allows for doing nothing beyond that. It allows non-action in the messy lives of others and is the position of liberalism. The second calls for positive action, even at great cost, and is filled with compassion. It is the position of Christ.

2. Time does not stand still and neither does anything else. Eternity, with us alive in it with the Lord, will continue when time ceases to exist. Time was created for the benefit of creation as we now know it to be. Everything is always changing. Resisting change is fruitless. This project is for us to change in the right direction, especially by getting into the stream of that which the Lord is doing at home, at work, at anywhere. Standing still is to rot in place because life and freshness must be continually produced. In fact, it has been said that “He who rejects change is the architect of decay.” That by Harold Wilson [1916-1995], former British Prime Minister.

3. I am continually blessed by seeing how the gospel flows out into the world to the benefit of all, even if the flow is not perceived to be the gospel of Jesus. Righteous principles straighten a person or a nation even if they do not know Jesus personally and have never heard of Him. That is one aspect of how the church is leaven in the world. Of course, we desire and work for the eternal salvation of souls by their acceptance of Jesus, their pursuit of discipleship, and each disciple’s acceptance of his crosswalk.

In the application of that Thought, it has been said that “the greatest pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do.” – Walter Bagehot [1826-1877], British journalist, businessman, essayist, economist, banker, mathematician, and moral philosopher. A spiritually minded Christian would go deeper with that testimony by saying something like, “The greatest pleasure in my life is in seeing Jesus bringing results through me that I cannot do myself.” That sort of life leads to personal testimony of the living Jesus Christ.

4. The only thing we are sure about are God and His Word/words. Everything else we might have wrong, at least to some extent. If we are convinced of that, it should be strong motivation to call His word and things of Him “Truth,” to study it, to rely upon it for direction, and to actually live His words however they come to us.

5. Civilizations come and go, none sustaining themselves over a long period of time. During our brief stays here on Earth we are tempted to think and live like things have always been the way they now are, and like they will never change. But one empire/culture follows another, each leaving something of itself for the next.

For example, Greek and Roman cultures continue to have their effects on us although for many centuries they have ceased being living cultures. Greece gave us culture [civilized us], democracy, language, jury trial, equality under the law, and systematic thought that enables scientific study and discovery. Rome gave us family order, law, education, progressive freedom from slavery, and language [English is Germanic in origin but borrows heavily from Latin and Latin-derived words].

An interesting Thought for us today is: What will be the legacy of our dying Western culture? First, consider the British Empire. It was the largest colonial empire in world history and shaped the world. The Brits had the defensive advantage of being an island nation, which lent itself to becoming a seafaring power in the days of sailing ships. Private enterprise promoted trade routes and the acquisition of new territories. Britain gradually gave up their conflicts with European rivals as they focused on overseas expansion. Today, America, Australia, Africa, Asia, and Europe show the strong impact of the Brits.

Although we are yet in the early stage of evaluating the legacy of the British Empire, it can be said that they strongly established English as the international language, established civilization among the underdeveloped continents and tribes [democracy, fair play, law and order, safetyness, efficiency, timeliness, and ended tyranny], and eventually granted independence [sometimes under pressure] to most of its colonies – offering it to the remainder.

With that example, back to our question. What do you think will be the legacy of our fading Western culture? We sell body parts of murdered babies, abandon the rule of law, promote greater dependency while trying to solve poverty, encourage evil nations in their evil deeds through trusting and trying to befriend them, inflate our money to the detriment of those who save, and overload our societies with those who do not intend to assimilate. Going a bit deeper, we have become a culture without a sense of absolutes, which weakens commitment, bravery, and honesty. Fear arises, and fear causes us to do strange things that cause disunity, unlovingness, and unfaithfulness. We become poor keepers of our brothers, and of ourselves.

It has been pointed out that in countries where Jews are uncomfortable, other things are going seriously wrong. That’s a clue that leads us to our problem and its solution. You who read THOUGHTS already know both. We have departed from the Lord and His life-giving instructions and are not now finding our way back to Him. Have you also noticed that since our departure we no longer know what to do with our guilt? Our Savior and His Father paid a tremendous price for us to know what to do with the guilt caused by our failures [sins]. Lacking that grace we are left with trying to spin sin into something less burdensome than it obviously is, or hating ourselves because of its heavy burden. Either of those two efforts lead to self-loathing and self-condemnation. Both of those self-criticisms are cancerous to the individual’s and culture’s soul. America’s prolonged guilt trip over slavery is an example of [whites] not being able to properly walk away from guilt and [blacks] not being able to forgive others. We have [another] crisis of truth, righteousness and faith. Ah, well; it seems that our Creator has scheduled all civilizations for dying by suicide, not murder. Humanly speaking, we are redeemed by Holy Spirit-cleansed self-will; spiritually speaking [and using more basic insightfulness] we are redeemed by God’s grace.

6-A. [For this Thought, remember that “imagination” does not mean only something unreal that is completely and unreasonably made up, like only a fantasy. It also means something that is real but that we must imagine in order to be able to think about and deal with it. Scientists must be able to imagine. They imagine that which is reasonable, perhaps at first reasonable only to them. Other scientists accept their reasonable and unreasonable imaginations and collaborate until facts and laws are established. Then others of less imagination can use their proven imaginations to create machinery, chemicals, etc. for us who simply accept and use the results of their imaginations for that which they have become – refrigerators, penicillin, ink, etc. But, remember that the scientist’s unseen thoughts were substances first seen by him, and his faith in that which he imagined produced results. It is the same for the faithful Christian. Our ability to imagine was created within us so that we could have and use faith, without which it is impossible to please our Creator.]

I think that our first approach to anything is [always ?] in the factual realm. Perhaps that only applies to men, not to women??? But it is a matter of real effort for me to make my initial approach to a matter solely from the imaginary, where faith-reality is stored. I begin with trying to get an intellectual grasp on the matter, looking at the simple facts, putting them together sensically, looking at them logically, applying wisdom, and endeavoring to see the outcome if I would pursue the reasoned, righteous course. My question on this Thought is whether we can come at the matter first through faith, as stored in our imagination. Is there an abiding spiritual habituation that can start us by first grasping “it” in faith? Is that the way Jesus’ completely human mind worked? Or, did He start in the natural, applying faith after He had made His natural appraisal of matters?

6-B. It seems that the Lord puts us in situations where we must speak and rely upon Him, or else deny Him -- our silence being denial. That sounds like the simple truth, to me. We have the right stuff and we benefit from it full-time, so we are able to be producers of rivers of living water. We are optimistic, so others around us become optimists, or they throw bricks at us. We love those who throw bricks at us, so we forgive them. They either change, hate us, or go off oblivious to our offer of Life. We live in Christ in an overarching realm of His values, as others strive for self-realization. “Social justice” is already real in us, so godly principles and relationships are lived as if “natural” – [no idea of having achieved sinless perfection is implied]. But something strange happens when we are challenged by humanists who accuse us of being “one way only, exclusive, and narrow-minded.” We run when they say that all religions are the same and have the same results. Television newscasts show Christians abandoning their uniqueness and falling for an artificial type of “love” when they are challenged on our basics. But we are different. We are unique. We have life where other religions are painful dead ends. That’s the truth. When we are challenged we need only speak the truth. Perhaps our levels of zeal and humility have not yet coincided.

7. Last month I suggested that couples could read together Solomon’s Song Book, for righteous invigoration. This month I suggest that you gentlemen who are seeking wives read two easily found items: Proverb 31:10-31 and the credit score of the sister you have become interested in. You might let the lady know that you are studying those items that speak to actions, not just knowledge. You are not looking for only professed character traits, but the real thing. We would not expect every good woman to meet all of those requirements but they do paint a usable picture of wifely virtue.

Guys, watch out! She might turn the study back on you.

The credit score is also a record of another important reality. It can be used to determine her relationship risk. The Federal Reserve points out that one’s credit score plays a significant role in the formation and dissolution of committed relationships. They report that one’s credit score indicates an individual’s trustworthiness and commitment to non-debt obligations. You might ask her for her credit score on your first date before you become too involved emotionally to be controlled by such a non-personal bit of information. ☺

8. It is the observation of some missionary organizations that the Lord increases and decreases the harvest in nations like He does the seasons. The time of greatest harvest in China was about 8 to 10 years ago, although there are still thousands of Chinese coming to faith in Jesus Christ every day. The worst report out of China is that materialism has gripped the hearts of millions and their desire for spiritual truth has waned compared to how it used to be. The same is reported of Nepal, but Laos and Indonesia are still ripe. In poor rural areas of India thousands of Hindus are repenting and putting their trust in Jesus, while the more modern areas of India are difficult to reach. The same applies to Vietnam, Myanmar and elsewhere.

Then there is Iran where the Lord is reaping a harvest of Iranians into His kingdom. Some missionaries there have never seen anyone as hungry for the gospel as Iranians are. Muslims literally chased them up and down the streets, pleading for them to tell them about Jesus and begging for a New Testament. They are fed up with their government, and know Islam is a bankrupt philosophy that holds no hope for their lives. The Lord of the harvest has His seasons, and now is harvest time for Iran.

Afghanistan is a difficult missionary field. Most of the missionaries there are known only to the Lord. Their biggest challenge is simple: Most Afghan believers are murdered soon after they convert to Jesus Christ. One missionary arranged a secret meeting for scattered Afghan believers so they could meet each other and enjoy fellowship with other Christians for the first time. Before the meeting took place, many of the believers were killed. If you believe that the Lord has a purpose for prayer -- a purpose that is related to answering your prayers – pray for Afghanistan.

9. There is a report on physician burnout that is worth some thought for all of us. Burnout is of the soul, although physical fatigue can be associated with burnout. Physical fatigue is fixed by rest, nutrition and hydration. Burnout is only patched by vacations and other distractions, but healing is accomplished by 1) restricting our efforts to the things we know are assigned to us by the Lord and 2) trusting the Lord both in things we can and cannot do. When we get into others’ and the Lord’s responsibilities we are not equipped for those tasks, so we overload and burn out. Burnout is not simply busy-ness or burden-carrying; it is overload because we have taken up [perhaps have been assigned] others’ tasks. God’s plus others’ responsibilities are always too much for us.

The physician burnout report says there are 5 causes. It is striking that these causes apply to the remainder of humanity – parents, pastors, supervisors and responsible people of all sorts. Apply them to yourself as is appropriate.

1) We are continually dealing with hurt, sick, scared, dying people and their families. The combination of high stress, great responsibility and little control are too much for many of us.

2) Variable stress-causing non-patient-care situations such as government and insurance company hassles, extra hours and days of covering for other doctors’ patients, personality and professional clashes, and local and national health care politics.

3) Inadequate time for “recharging our batteries” [our personal lives], having been taught that the patient always comes first.

4) Character traits that are built into the job [workaholic, “solved” by working harder; superhero, needing to be the one who solves every problem; perfectionist, no doctor should ever make a mistake; and Lone Ranger, doing everything ourselves plus managing all others].

5) Dissatisfaction with our immediate supervisor.

And there are 3 cardinal symptoms of burnout:

1) Exhaustion – low emotional energy, and spiraling downward.

2) Depersonalization, or “compassion fatigue” – no longer emotionally available to patients or anyone.

3) Lack of efficiency – doubt the meaning and quality of our work; worry about making mistakes.

What to do?! We cannot avoid all responsibility but we can identify ours and do some rearranging of tasks, if necessary and possible. If no changes are possible, it may be that we need to share our emotional overload with others, the Lord being our foremost Other. Jesus spent hours and nights in prayer, with good results. “Leave room for God” is a well-used reminder, meaning do what we should, then stand aside. Remember who is our Supreme Supervisor and do all things for Him.

10. An elder of our city asked me to answer a question: “What three things in the church do the most damage to the testimony of Jesus in our jurisdiction and what contributes to the systemic poverty of soul in our culture?” It is easy to see the Lord’s movement among us in many positive ways, but that is not what he asked me to report on. So, I determined to not be light-handed. In the tradition of Jesus [Luke 16:31], I asked our brothers Moses, Jesus, Matthew, James, Paul, and others to judge us. The results, from their writings, are as follow:

Our core problem: There is a failure of our love for the Lord, for our brothers, and for our neighbors. A holy God will not open our ears and eyes when we are determined to hold to our sin – Luke 9:44-46. Only true repentance changes that otherwise unsolvable condition.

The evidence, from three observation points:

1. We, the church in Corpus Christi, are content with the weakness of our unity. Corporate weakness among disciples was one of Jesus’ heaviest of two burdens before His arrest; His personal weakness was the other. We keep our polite distances; are comfortably uninvolved; tolerate traditional walls; are not pursuant of different others; do not defer to one another for protocol when gathering together; do not coordinate for one another’s priorities; are not sacrificial for one another; do not know what rank keeping is, thus cannot keep it; and each person/congregation/denomination is content with doing what is right in our own eyes.

2. We, the church in Corpus Christi, do not believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are not living the simplicity of the gospel: not living every word that proceeded from His mouth; not inviting the poor to our feasts, homes, lives; thus we annul His commandments and teach others to do the same; we do not fast; we store up treasures on earth; we strike a “healthy” balance of service between our two masters [God and Mammon]; we are very sectarian, and it shows; we pray for new wine but only for putting in our old wine skins; we make babies, not disciples [thus it is unavoidable that we are producing only what we are]; we do not sell all that we are and have to purchase the pearl of great price, so we are left to talk about it; we rely upon tradition, having lost the essences of those traditions; we take up our crosses, then pray that we will not need them; we do not pursue lost lambs and sheep, nor those who are chained in spiritual darkness; we do not humble ourselves; we are blind guides; we devise false spiritualities and catch phrases, showing our dead men’s bones and uncleanliness; we are not spiritual shepherds, but hirelings, and don’t know the difference; we are reasonable religionists, thus acceptable to the world but not to God.

3. Being self-focused, we, the church in Corpus Christi, are blind, deaf, and unrepentant, so are not aware that much of our condition is the Lord’s chastening hand upon us.

WHEW! Well, that’s what he asked for.

11. We know to not let the sun go down on our wrath/anger, don’t we. Unbridled passions of any sort begin to possess us as we allow them to linger. In Ezekiel 35:5 the Lord and Ezekiel use the term “everlasting enmity.” That was written about the Edomites and their ongoing hatred against Israel. Let’s not allow ourselves to justify or in any other way tolerate “soul cancers.”

12. It is wonderful how we can tolerate others when we are secure in our souls. When a Christian is walking in his security – meaning he knows whose He is, knows what he is about, knows he is immortal until the Lord is finished with him here – he can tolerate others’ challenges and remain peaceful and productive. In 2 Samuel 19:22 King David let Shimei’s offence pass like water off a duck’s back, “For do I not know that I am king over Israel today?” David showed some of Jehovah’s confidence in who He was when He said to Moses, “Tell them I AM sent you.” The Lord is not a man who would be threatened. He knows who He is, what He is about, and that He will accomplish all He intends.

13. Love creates beauty. No, it does not imagine beauty where there is no beauty. It sees the truth, lives truth, and creates truth. Love creates beauty out of ugliness. Husbands, watch that delightful process at work in you as time gradually passes.

14. Ezekiel was exiled in Babylon among the other Israelites about 600 years before Christ. He prophesied [12:13] that the king of Israel would eventually be brought to Babylon, “yet would not see it, though he would die there.” That must have sounded strange to some, as does much of prophecy [both old and contemporary] sound to us. Then in 2 Kings 25:7 we see how the questionable was exactly performed. That king was first blinded by the Babylonians, and then brought to Babylon. Prophets see partly, but they do see. If they do not embellish that which they receive, much of their words will for a time, be obscure. The faithful, prophets or otherwise, store them up [memory, computer, documents, books, etc.] until their time to be revealed. But do remember them. Every word of God will come to pass.

15. There are truths we know but don’t live by. We know we are in and part of the body of Christ. Picture this: Jesus Christ’s one-person body was whole, healthy, and fully functional. When He talks of our being His body, the body of Christ, that means we are being offered the same wholeness, health, and functionality as He was and had in His one-person body. Nothing less! We are not only to be good, faithful and productive Christians who relate properly to one another. We are also to be open and attached parts who are and function 24/7 as a body, with local and worldwide expressions of the same. That Corinthian church was a powerful group, and they knew how to be an assembly of anointed believers in their Living God. However, although they had their theologies well-tuned, they did not rightly judge/perceive their body life. They were a group of faithful believers but were still individuals who had their own individual lives before God. For example, if anyone knew he/she had a word/ministry from the Lord, they were hell-bent [a deliberately chosen term] on obeying Him. They knew He had moved on or spoken to them. They knew that the Head had spoken but they failed to understand that He would coordinate whatever He said with in His multiple-person body. Had they judged the body rightly, they would have submitted to the mind of Christ among them that which they were absolutely positive they had heard from the Head, and moved forward only when/if the body fully agreed with the Head. To those then and now who do not rightly judge the body, to live that way is heretical. To those who know the desires and precious workings of the Lord, that He came to form a living body, that perception and subsequent process is overpowering. There in Corinth they did not perceive that depth of the body of Christ. One of the consequences was that there was weakness, sickness and premature death among them. Those were consequences which continue among us.

We are in our wilderness like Israel was in its wilderness. They wandered about receiving God’s blessings corporately and individually, but dying off before their time and living in despair and unbelief – as blessed believers. Likewise, in our times of decision-making, life involvements, and trials we too faint, fracture and mistrust. My personal testimony has times when I and usually a certain other brother, Bob West, would hear the Lord about going to another nation, be given the face of a person, receive facts about his education and work and hearts’ desire, be told what to do and not do, and what would happen and not happen. We were absolutely sure that the Lord told us those things and that He had commanded us to go. But, before we made any plans, we took the whole matter to our brother elders, laid out the entire plan, and said, “Now, if all of you are not 100% sure that this is of the Lord, we will not go.” After some discussion and prayer, Christ’s Head seated there at the right hand of His Father, and His body on earth were in agreement as completely as when He walked the earth Himself. Then we went and He did exactly like He said He would do, including putting us face to face with the person(s) He had told us about. The results were dramatic. We need to learn to judge Christ’s body rightly, and live in it no matter how faithful and capable we are or imagine ourselves to be individually.

More on perceiving the body of Christ in Thought No. 18.

16. If you ever want to disturb the status quo at church, start defining our obstacles to revival [revival being any form of “getting serious with the Lord”] as “cluttered Hollywood stuff,” T-V, newspapers, magazines, parties, bowling alleys, camping trips, and the like. Those very acceptable things keep our ears, eyes, and minds attracted to things of this world instead of to the Lord Himself. It shows that we are willing to give God “His part” of our lives but not our lives. On the other hand, outstanding features of the presence or imminent presence of God is the profound consciousness of Him, His holiness, our conviction of sin, abandonment of anything that would diminish Him in our lives, desire for His word [both written and freshly spoken], and fellowship with like-minded God-seekers. Revival is not a touch-up, but a combination of friendly take-over and friendly yield-over.

17. By God’s grace, believers have been made perfect in Christ and, as we walk by faith, are being made perfect in Christ. What is your biggest snag as you see yourself moving forward in the “are being” part of our perfection process? For some it is unforgiveness; for others impatience, pride, gluttony, etc. It is essential that we recognize our weaknesses and trust the Lord for his ongoing handiwork. He is creation’s only soul changer. Keep your hands off of others’ souls, and off of your own. Learn how to be the Lord’s lover and speaker and servant of others, while remembering that we are His workmanship.

18. Paul wrote to the saints in the church in Corinth that, based on that which he was hearing about them, they were not perceiving the body of Christ – not perceiving that which they really were. See 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. They were indeed their local presentation of the body of Christ, but they did not perceive it [they were not adequately aware of that which they were; that which was actually them; did not appreciate the reality of themselves]. If Jesus Christ Himself had sat down in their midst they would have absolutely changed their behavior, compared to their then-current behavior among themselves.

What behavior was Paul talking about? At their Communion Service/Supper some fed themselves first or only, leaving the needy without. They were “first in line at the church supper.” He gave them some very basic instructions, such as “eat something at home before coming together,” so they could better control their appetites at the Supper. He ended by saying that they were not judging the body rightly, meaning they were not perceptive of the reality of their **being** **the body of Christ.** If Christ had walked into their Communion Service/Supper they would have judged their situation correctly and adjusted their behavior accordingly. He told them that there was no difference between Jesus’ body of Jesus Himself and Jesus’ body of they themselves. God did not call them the Body of Christ so they would have a religious label and a warm feeling among themselves. He meant what He called them.

As a result of such misjudgment/misperception on their part, they did not have the benefit of His abiding presence in particular ways [physical problems of weakness, sickness and premature death]. So, the Jewish leaders and the Romans were not the only ones who did not rightly perceive the bodily presence of Jesus as Christ or of us as His body. Hearing the truth helps, but some things must also have the impactfulness of revelation or they have no effect. We, too, fail to see Christ in one another and in His highly formed corporate body.

19. Question: When did Jesus become the Anointed One? Answer: When the Holy Spirit descended upon Him following His water baptism. Before then, for His first 30 years, He was the One to be Anointed. Question: Why did Jesus need to be water baptized, and publicly? Answer: He, too, had to publicly repudiate His natural self in complete submission to God, announcing it publicly and necessarily before all beings in heaven and on earth. Then two things happened: God the Father spoke from heaven concerning Him, and He was led into places of temptation in order to seal His and His Father’s commitments. Jesus the Anointed One had to suffer in order to perfect His obedience – Heb. 5:8-9.

20. Worship can be defined as the believer’s full focus on I AM WHO I AM. The result of such worship is the neutralization of evil.

21. “Arbitrary power is like most other things which are very hard, very liable to be broken.” – Abigail Adams [1744-1818], wife of America’s second president, mother of America’s sixth president. She was not against the exercise of power, but knew that governments had to be controlled by the governed. That will remain true until the Perfect One comes back to earth and sets up His dictatorship. Absolute power absolutely corrupts, unless that power is absolutely righteous.

22. We really enjoy the sense of the Lord’s presence, don’t we. Removing that sense [but not His presence] is part of His plan for maturing us. The point is that we need to walk and obey in faith in between the times of those wonderful senses of His presence – in those “dry times.” That’s when we live only in the obedience of faith. As usual, on His cross Jesus went through the same thing we must go through when we are on our crosses.

23. “All great things and all great thoughts have a ridiculous beginning.” – Albert Camus [1913-1960], French author, journalist and philosopher, questionably a believer in “a god.” However, he said, “I would rather live my life as if there is a god and die to find out there isn’t, than live my life as if there isn’t and die to find out there is.” It sounds like he had the good generic depth of revelation required of all humanity, as in Romans 1.

24. There seems to be a growing modern political theory that says governments are to be administered by experts who are guided by modern science. That is a real threat. It diminishes the person and the family, equalizes economic outcomes beyond reality, and replaces parliamentary government [rulers in discourse governed by rules] with scientific administration. [Read that sentence a few times.] That has happened to us in America, and can be best seen in our new health care system. Individual health care between the doctor and his patient has become mathematically and financially driven. The individual and family are statistics; their health care is governed by more statistics [age, complexity of health, social status, value to society, life expectancy, etc. – *all statistics and administered statistically by statisticians*]. Equal economic outcomes [which can never be accomplished] result in a forced dumbing down of all outcomes in order to achieve a desired equality. That describes socialism, known in its worst present form as communism.

25. Recently I was asked to say a few simple things about “can a Christian live a perfect life?” Listen in on my edited response:

1) Perfect means being like our Father in heaven who, beyond having never sinned, is **ENTIRELY HOLY!!!** He is our only target [Matthew 5:48] which cannot be attained in this human earth-life except by Jesus Christ. Something close to it may be in God’s long distance plan for us??

2) Perfect means being on God’s schedule for one’s personal route and timing of sanctification. That is offered to every believer and I think many have taken, are taking, and will take it. It encompasses our wanderings, sinnings, successes, and all else that occupies the livingness of our God-ordained human condition. It requires the peace and grief of a sensitive and well-used heart of repentance. It ends with “Well done, good and faithful child. Enter into My glory.” It means that at our personal appearance before Christ at His judgment seat He and we will have nothing negative to talk about, that we His sinful born again children lived alive to the Lord and stayed “confessed up,” as was Job in 1:1, 8; 2:3.

3) When we are born again we receive God’s Holy Spirit, which Jesus had all His years from His conception in His mother’s womb. That made Him God’s Son in human flesh; and which makes us God’s sons in human flesh when we are born again. A major difference between Jesus and us is that from the time of our flesh birth we were trained by our earthly spiritual father, Satan, to be carnally minded and responsive to him – Jesus was not subjected to that defect. Jesus, having had that advantage from His onset, did not have to be born again in order to have what it took for Him to live perfectly sinless. Yet, He could have chosen to sin, but He chose righteousness. Before we were born again we had loads of sin-habits ingrained in our souls. However, we then received the Holy Spirit, which if we had lived alive only to Him, would have prevented all of our sinnings. But we didn’t. That’s why we are 100% responsible for our sins. At that point, the sins of a peaceful and spiritually sensitive son of God are no problem to the Lord and need not remain a problem to us. He has already paid a tremendous, mega-universal price for our sins. We are forgiven for the asking, and the slate is again washed clean, readying us for the judgment seat of Christ as if we had never sinned, perfectly atoned for by His at-one-ing sacrifice.

That helps answer some of the question of how are we going to get to where He is, He being the Way, if we don’t follow Him perfectly.

26. I found that when I was grasped by the Lord and plunged into Him, I did not have to separate myself from many of my friends. [That’s a confession about myself and some of those friends.] They did that for me. As a transformed person, whose mind was being regenerated, I was easily separated from those whom I should have been separated – at that time. As time passed, I was sent back into the pack, the pack being some of the same people but mostly new ones of the same sort. That process continues. I am comfortable with them, even the worst reprobates, having been cut from the same original cloth and been given grace that is now available for them. We need not fear that from which we have been delivered. If we have not been delivered, or if we do not have the assurance of being delivered, we would be wise to use caution, avoiding possible contamination.

27. Do you see and healthfully appreciate the importance of persecution, thwarted plans, delays, hurt feelings, corrections, rebukes, etc. from within and without the church? A knowledge of God’s ways, and an alertness to His hand upon us in those ways, helps us get the most from our more painful encounters, doesn’t it! Question: How otherwise would you prefer your sanctification process be conducted, and by whom else than the Lord? If we had the Lord’s holiness, wisdom, knowledge, and love [meaning “If we were God”] we would do it the same way. Don’t allow yourself to think of exceptions.

28. Being born again into God’s family is essential and permanent, but we were not simply born to be born. We need to learn to not poop in our diapers, then how to change our own diapers, then how to change other family members’ diapers [and non-family members’ diapers]. He who says he no longer poops in his diapers is a liar – 1 John 1:8-10.

29. I was asked to speak on Light and Salt. In brief, Light is the presentation of our selves as sons of God; Salt is our deeds that we offer up to our Father, usually in the presence of humanity.

First, some comments on Light: Scripture said the Messiah would come and would be the light of the world. Then He came. Surprise! He enlarged that Old Testament prophecy about His being the light of the world by adding that we are the light of the world. [He could do that because He is the Author of His Book.] That’s us, the one church with all our differences and faults. He has made us to be His light in this very dark world.

Light speaks allegorically to CHARACTER, PERSONALITY, and NATURE. We are the enlightened ones who are light for others. We are a reflection of Jesus the human who was God; who actually lived on earth among us. Now those who believe in Him and follow Him are the human reflection of God on earth. We are His body. Through us the world is blessed with a good picture of Jesus, and at other times is afflicted with a not so good picture.

Being God’s light, we provide clarity for the world so it will not do so much stumbling in the dark. We are examples of how the unbelieving world is to live and talk and behave and work and vacation and sing and drive and love and etc. When the church united is good light, the world around us is coordinated, purposeful and resolute [meaning christianized]; when the church disunited is poor light, the world around us is fragmented, indecisive and adrift.

We have the option of where our light will shine and how bright it will be. The world can resist our light but must yield the brighter we shine.

Second, in the Old Testament God required that all sacrifices offered to Him would be salted – or they would not be acceptable to Him or of use to His people and the world. In Scripture, salt ordinarily refers to acceptability and purity. For example, the prophet Elisha put salt in a spring of bitter water and its water became pure and sweet – acceptable and usable. Salt on the sacrifices offered up to God made them acceptable and usable to God and man.

Salt speaks allegorically of the church’s DEEDS and WORKS offered to God and to the world. Because we are God’s gift of salt for the earth our labors rehabilitate nations, cities, counties, corporations and our neighbors. When we and our ministries are openly truthful and show brotherhood and freedom, the world sees how things can and should be done, good results ensue, and the world agrees with our presentation of “normal.” When the church loses its saltiness, bitterness and dysfunction return.

Words, including words about our being Light and Salt [CHARACTER, PERSONALITY, and NATURE plus DEEDS and WORKS] can be feeble without testimony to back them up. Here is a bit of testimony:

The Lord sent Bob West and me to a small village in Southern Mexico, in the foothills of the Sierra Madres of the South, beyond the end of the road. He had pinpointed that village for us on a large map of Mexico. His instructions focused on our going there “to have fellowship with the [Roman Catholic – ed.] priest in that village.”

We knew that the area, like most of Mexico, was strongly anti-Protestant. We were Protestants, but not protestant Protestants. We went as part of the body of Christ to another part of the body of Christ.

We traveled by plane to the state capital, by bus as close as it went to the village, by dugout canoe across the last river, and by foot the remaining miles into the village. After a brief rest in the village square we went to the church and asked to speak to the priest. [IN THIS TESTIMONY REMEMBER THAT WE COULD NOT SPEAK SPANISH AND THAT NO ONE IN THE VILLAGE COULD SPEAK ANY ENGLISH. I HAD ABOUT 20 WORDS OF SPANISH AT MY COMMAND AND BOB WEST HAD PERHAPS 30. MANY OF OUR WORDS WERE PATIO, TAMALI, MANANA, ADIOS, AND THE LIKE.]

We were received warmly. There were two priests in residence. For three weeks we spent 2 hours daily laboring to get across the simple message of who and what we were and that God had sent us to have fellowship. We knew that perhaps He had additional plans but they were yet known. The success of our efforts to communicate depended on our being able to relate closely and openly from our hearts. We listened to one another and labored to interpret our hand motions and made-up words. Another key to communicating was that we had a deep desire to understand and know one another. Our souls quickly were knit together. After our first day’s visit the priest in change assigned a young man to us, to get us a place to sleep, a place to eat, and to help us in whatever else we needed.

After about 2 weeks we were touched by the obvious need for better medical care in the village. There were two Mexican doctors, both of whom required payment for their services. Both had cash-only pharmacies. Deep poverty was common so many had no health care. Soon we told the priests that we believed the Lord had sent us to start a medical clinic in the village. Their response was, “We have been praying that God would send us a doctor who would treat our poor people.” Not only were we not religious enemies; we were answers to their prayers.

After two more short visits we established and staffed a medical clinic. Here follows the known and suspected cultural changes that resulted from our fellowship with those saints [“HOW TO CHANGE A CULTURE” WAS THE TOPIC OF THIS TALK TO CORPUS CHRISTI CITY LEADERS – ed.]:

1. Early on, the Lord converted one of those Mexican doctors. He and I had great fellowship, he started going to church, being personally and professionally concerned for people, and treating all comers. Over the years he maintained the clinic full-time and maintained the Mexican staff [a “nurse” and a “laboratory technician”] that we trained for him. We came occasionally for weeks or months at a time. Without my asking, that doctor got me, and any other American doctors who came with me, official permission to practice medicine in Mexico. Several years later the government brought in a government clinic. Our doctor friend then took an administrative position in the medical offices in the state capital.

Noted medical culture change: A physician was converted, local health was improved, and [we hope] the doctor with his renewed mind had an effect on their government-run medical system.

2. The wall of separation between Christian brothers was broken down locally between those Catholics and us non-protestant Protestants. We asked and were allowed to attend the church so we could pray and worship with them. They were our local church family. We knew we would spend eternity with them and we were eager to start now. We acknowledged the priest’s pastoral authority over our lives and they exercised it. In turn, the priests, who had become our brothers, told the people to observe our lives and to copy us. The priests visited our clinic daily and occasionally visited our residence. The people told us: “When you came we knew you were Protestants; then we saw that you are Christians.”

Noted religious culture change: They received and accepted a broader understanding of being Christian.

3. Socio-economically we were “rich Americans and out of their class” but because we related as servant-brothers we were granted family status by the people. In conversation, when we were asked why we did things the ways we did them, we often referred to what the Bible said, but we did not formally instruct them. As a result, the peoples’ interests were stirred. They asked the priests to teach them the Bible, and they started having Bible studies in the church.

Noted religious culture change: The Bible as God’s fresh words came alive in the local church.

4. In a wonderful encounter in the airport in Mexico City and during a two-hour flight, the Lord gave me close and exciting fellowship with the Papal Nuncio to Mexico, an Italian bishop. Thereafter we visited twice in the Papal Nuncio’s residence in Mexico City and continued communicating for several years, including when he became Papal Nuncio to Canada. Later he became a Cardinal and for years was attached to the Vatican. He has since gone home to be with the Lord.

Noted religious culture change: More walls came down between Christians of various understandings of the Lord and His ways, these in the upper levels of the church.

5. The Papal Nuncio introduced me to the local bishop. In a public ceremony we three had a conversation that was broadcasted across the state, in which we Protestants and our ministry were welcomed by the Papal Nuncio and the local bishop. [By then I had taken some intensive lessons in Spanish.]

Noted religious culture change: Mid-level religious walls came down and were replaced with Holy Spirit quality of brotherhood.

6. That village had a military outpost of about 12 soldiers and a sergeant, located on the square. Mexico’s border with Guatemala was 40 miles further through the mountains. During our initial visit we intentionally established contact with the soldiers. That encounter immediately became adversarial as the sergeant pressed us with a serious interrogation. He was filled with suspicion and hostility, which left us unable to communicate with one another. Recall that, not being able to communicate verbally, we had no problem communicating with the priests because our hearts were open to one another. But in the more precarious of our non-communication moments with the sergeant the Lord supernaturally intervened, resulting in immediate warm, brotherly fellowship and a long, robust singing party on the veranda. When we left one week later the sergeant treated us to a teary-eyed four-gun military sendoff on the river bank. He said: “You will always be in my heart and in my memory.”

Noted military culture change: Only the Lord knows, but the sergeant and his soldiers clearly were impacted spiritually.

30. Wisdom does not require a great memory. In fact, wisdom begins to bloom about the time memory begins to fade. My father was a good example of that. For many years he had slowly increasing dementia, even to forgetting his sons’ names and not recognizing my mother. I could tell him the same joke every five minutes and he would laugh at it afresh each time. As his memory and speech faded, he could not recognize me but he could counsel me and others from his deep reservoir of wisdom. He was always spot-on, as long as he was given enough time to think and respond. He did not need to remember people and principles because his soul had been enriched and firmly formed, from which he counseled as long as he could speak. So, wisdom does not require a great memory. Give those grey heads who are “losing it” an opportunity to pass along some of their wisdom before they go home.

31. Have you noticed that the church in Africa, Asia, and South America has been offered the same emptiness that has consumed the church in Europe and America? But they have not taken the cool-aid. That is encouraging. Perhaps those “third world” branches of the church have become the “first world” of the church as we have fallen backward into emptiness. They may be our best hope for revival, for the renewal of Christianity’s distinctive message, so that the future of the world is not reduced to Western secularism. Christianity has its unique and necessary core, which is more [and other] than just being spiritual or religious. We have the resurrected and ascended Jesus Christ, and have been granted His Holy Spirit. There is nothing like us. Weep and cheer as the church both declines/falls away and rises up gloriously.

32. This is a heart-warming, exciting Thought about a new brother, D. W., especially if you know him. He is a good example of what the Lord does when He chooses us to be born again. He was a corpse, a dead dog, until the Lord infused him with His Holy Spirit. Now he is a new person. He and all who knew him before his being born again stand amazed at the handiwork of God [Eph. 2:10].

33. In your abundant spare time, study this Thought, which is a recent Bible Study lesson on “The Power of Not Being in Charge vs. the impotence of being in charge when you should not be, or of being rebellious and uncooperative even though staying in place.”

ADVANCE NOTICE! This probably will be my most wasted teaching of the year, because the Lord’s enemy, our ex-father, Satan, has ingrained his ways into our souls so deeply that, even after we are born again and have our new Father, many of us do not want to be remade completely. By that I mean to say that when we have been freed and healed sufficiently to give us relief, we are satisfied to keep our remaining unrighteousnesses. Those unrighteousnesses are things like justified fears, proven insecurities, satisfied ignorances, and deep-seated resentments.

My premise: We who are not in charge have been dealt the winning hand by the Lord, so we should play by the rules [don’t cheat] and raise the bets [even greater submission to earthly authority]. Example: Our local Roman Catholic bishop when we moved to Corpus Christi in 2009. The Catholic Church is noted for keeping close ecclesiastical order, at least compared to other denominations. I asked him for permission for me to tell his parish priests that which the Lord told me He was going to do in Corpus Christi. He gave me permission, and wrote a list of those parish priests with whom I should start, adding that they would be receptive but that some others would think I was Satan.

“One should always play fairly when he has the winning hand.” – Oscar Wilde. When you have the winning hand you 1) play by the rules and 2) raise the bid/increase the pot. Compare Joseph as a slave in Egypt, David’s behavior under King Saul, and the Son of God “keeping rank” with God and man while He was here [including with His earthly family].

Focusing on our topic, “The Power of Not Being in Charge:” When we are not in charge many of us think we do not have a winning hand. Therefore, we fold instead of raising the bid. One always-ready alternative to winning with God’s “Plan A” is Satan’s “Plan B,” which is to become resistant, protective, to withdraw, or perhaps to initiate an effort to take over. That is called rebellion, the punishment for which is death [Old Testament physical death; New Testament spiritual death/loss]. At best, our rebellious misadventures result in hollowed-out successes, patterned after Satan’s success 1) in the Garden of Eden, 2) over Jesus on the cross, and 3) over Queen Jezebel and King Ahab and the church in Thyatira. Perhaps we can also compare America’s rebellion against England, with our subsequent Civil War which by then England had peacefully forsaken slavery. Perhaps [again meaning “only God knows”] had we longer tolerated King George we would have averted two wars with England and between our North and South states. Also recall that the Roman Catholic Church had its own reformation 100 years after the Protestant Reformation had split the corrupt church, but by then Martin Luther’s reformed theology was no longer available within the Roman Catholic Church. I think we tend to run or rebel just when the long-pregnancy’s labor pains finally begin – just when the long wait is about to pay off.

Remember last week’s lesson and testimony about how the Lord changed the culture of a village in Southern Mexico when we Protestants submitted ourselves to all levels of authority there. Those culture changes were in Mexican-American attitudes, the unity of Jesus’ Church [Catholic and Protestant], the quality of medical practice in that area of Mexico, and at least a few of Mexico’s military – to extents currently known only to the Lord.

God’s marriage-long promise to Nancy [and others’ wives] in 1 Peter 3:1 says that His power is available to change me through her humility. He had positioned her in my life to be His tool to change me, and still is changing me through her. She is my perfect helper, as is every wife to her husband once the “I do’s” are spoken. Daily I continue to be amazed and challenged by the power of her faith and love. One of her favorite Proverbs is 14:1. It pinpoints wifely wisdom and God’s grace under husbands’ authority. The following verse [14:2] speaks of following the Lord vs. becoming devious.

Principles:

God the Trinity is organized within Himself. He has His ways and character, and He holds Himself to them. Whatever the cost, He does not change. The Trinity is absolutely faithful and united, which is what He is offering us – individually, locally and broadly.

He created His creation to have order, including His type and degree of order among His humans. The freedom given believers in Jesus is given so we can stay in order with God and man, plus for other reasons. We are now free to trust and obey the Lord no matter the cost, and despite 1) the objections of the world about us, 2) the protestations of our flesh, and 3) the lies of the devil himself. Examples of God’s established order: male and female, husband and wife, parents and children, church leaders and other saints, civic leaders and citizens, employers and employees, God and humanity.

Some organizational relationships are not so clear-cut immediately, but the Holy Spirit sorts out those relationships when we listen to Him and relate humbly to one another.

Authority and power come when we function in His ways and within our callings. We follow the Holy Spirit into our wildernesses [Luke 4:1-2, 13-14] and He brings powerful results. But, after we have counted the cost [Luke 14:25-33] and have decided to not go into our wilderness or to not stay once there – we suffer loss. Sin tells us, “Don’t submit. It won’t work. Stay on your present course. If you are wrong God will forgive you later.” Selah.

Note: the definition of a wilderness is “an adverse event, perfectly designed for my immediate and eternal benefit by the Lord, in which I have the option of righteousness or unrighteousness.”