THOUGHTS OF JUNE, 2015

Usually my Thoughts are listed every month in the order they occurred to me, but this unnumbered thought “at the top” came at the end of the month and is being placed above No. 1.

Long before the Supreme Court devaluated marriage this week by labeling homosexual unions as “marriage,” we heterosexuals devalued it. Our divorce rate, 50%, in or out of the church, is one example. The quality of marriage and family life is another example. The basics of husband-wife relations is another. Then there is the general “bless me,” non-biblical, non-cross-bearing life. The list is long. My point is that we first devalued the living of Christ’s life in marriage. That something has filled the vacuum should be no surprise.

This is no time to wring our hands in fear and insecurity. It is time to see where we are, how we got here, [oh, yes; repent], and learn to live as exiles in our own country. You, being biblically-informed Christians, know the process: Be convicted of our own sin, repent before the Lord of our own sin, ask Him to show us how bad it really was and is, ask Him to forgive us [personally and corporately], accept His forgiveness, unify [disunity was part of how we got where we should not be], plan together on how to live under growing persecution, teach our children how to live in resilient, faithful Christian communities [as have the Jews as Jews for millennia], and move ahead.

When our cleansing has been adequate the Redeemer will redeem us, if His scheduled plans for planet Earth do not radically change things before then [rapture, tribulation, second coming, millennium]. Our remnant will help re-form Christianity and our civilization. The Holy Spirit will lead us on how and when to do that. But, first, the church will need to repent, unite, find our righteousness, and live again under paganism. Look up!

1. What holds you back from living the gospel of Jesus? Perhaps I should have started by stating that no one of us fully lives Jesus’ gospel, that we know such to be true about ourselves, and that we have consciously designed our own cover for falling short. What prevents us?

Is it reason? Reason is a gift of God given, among other things, for the purpose of holding us back from wrong actions. When we have used it to justify living other than the gospel, it has conquered and replaced faith.

Is it fear? Fear is a gift of God given, among other things, for the purpose of holding us back from a dumb misfortune. When we have used it to justify living other than the gospel, it has conquered and replaced peace.

Is it discomfort? Discomfort is a gift of God given, among other things, for the purpose of disturbing our self-centered ease. When we have used it to justify living other than the gospel, it has conquered and replaced our crosses.

Faith destroys reason; peace destroys fear; our crosses destroy self-centered ease. We are given good tools. Let’s use them.

2. The Christian who lives by human love will deny others the truth, usually to avoid confrontation, if indeed he knows the truth. But if he 1) knows the truth and 2) lives by Christ’s love he will be compelled to live and speak the truth in Christ’s love, risking confrontations but trusting in God’s outcome. The church corporate can do the same within itself, as can families. Simply put, if parents do not teach their children the difference between right and wrong, perhaps because they want them to grow up deciding those things for themselves, or wanting to keep “peace” in the family, those children will become disorderly adults. They may not intend to be disorderly, but they will be disorderly. At best, each one so taught will be doing what is right in his own eyes, as taught by his parents.

Shakespeare wrote that sometimes it is necessary to be cruel [toughlove] in order to be kind. Wise parents and church leaders understand him. Learn from Proverb 19:18.

3. Like the healthy minds among you, I too hope for as little suffering as possible. However, we know the facts. We will suffer. Having accepted that fact, it is a matter of remembering that we will triumph over our sufferings and be better for them. That makes good news of the process.

But certain things must be settled quickly or we will suffer more than needed. It is very uncomfortable to sit long on a picket fence and wrestle against the facts. Get off of the fence by making your decision.

There are many picket fences; one is ready for our every decision and commitment. They are designed for our discomfort, to bring us to commitments that need to be nailed down, not wobbled over – difficult marriages and other relationships, difficult jobs and assignments, anything needing to be decided. Have you also noticed the discomfort of picket fences?

4. The reality and depth of God’s love for us is so real that it is unreal to us. The prodigal son’s father didn’t even let his son start his hang-dog, coming home speech. He grabbed him [as if the son might bolt for the door and leave again] and immersed him in the celebration of his homecoming. He had no more chance of giving his repentance speech than did the woman taken in the act of adultery. To deal with her sin, Jesus told her to go and not do that sin any more [not “don’t do any kind of sin again” – ed.]. That’s love, real and deep, and effective.

5. Consider those first two verses of Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.” Did the Lord make David do that, or did He only influence/persuade/lead him to do it? It seems that David was saying that the Lord did cause him to lie down, but that it was not against David’s will. In fact, David seemed to be glad he was actively participating in the action.

The same seems to be true in Revelation 13:16: “And he [the beast – ed.] causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, ..” The beast appears to be influencing, not forcing, people to do what he wants for them – his mark. Persuasive powers are wonderful. One person can persuade others to obey him or else be murdered, while another can persuade others to obey him because He loved them to His own death.

6. In Thought 5 above, the beast’s mark will be placed on the right hand or on their forehead. That will show their allegiance to him, and will be necessary in order to buy or sell. Compare that to Exodus 13:9, 16 where the Lord told His people to wear frontlet bands [phylacteries] on their hand and on their forehead, as a sign and reminder that He had delivered them from Egypt [thus belonged to Him and that He would be their God]. Do our up-front lives show whom we are serving?

7. Isaiah 5:8-23’s multiple woes sound like the same person as in Matthew 23:13-36, doesn’t it. He is.

8. “Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection, we can catch excellence.” – Vince Lombardi [1913-1970], American football coach and dedicated Catholic.

9. “Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance.” – Will Durant [1885-1981], Catholic, American writer, historian, philosopher, and Pulitzer Prize winner. Yes, the more education we get, the more we realize how uneducated we have been and still are. There is a wealth of information available.

10. Committed sinners [those committed to their sin(s)], in or out of the church, cannot know the depth of our love for them until they know we know the truth about them.

11. Must we choose between the truth and love? The pressure is certainly there. On one hand, it is said that if we tell the committed sinner God’s truth about his sin we will be perceived as being unloving and unaccepting of him. On the other hand, it is said that if we love the committed sinner without telling him God’s truth about his sin, he and others will think his sin is acceptable to us and to God. To much of the church, that is a dilemma.

Truth and love go together like, as the song says, love and marriage go together and like a horse and carriage go together. Problem is, it is costly to become qualified to administer the two, and again costly to do it. The more it costs, the more valuable it is.

12. In the 200s and 300s A. D., Arius lured church leadership into denying Christ’s deity, but the faithful saints “in the pews” drew the church back by refusing to follow.

Arius was at the first Council of Nicaea [325 AD], when he was deposed from his bishopric and exiled from the church. Debate became so heated that one bishop struck Arius across the face, at which another bishop urinated on that bishop’s robe. If you are tempted to believe that nothing good could come out of such a meeting, and that surely the Lord was not “with” them, remember that that Council eventually agreed on a creed for the church, known as the Nicene Creed – a profession of faith that is widely used in the church. Look it up if you don’t know it.

13. St. Augustine said: “Lord Jesus, don’t let me lie when I say that I love you … and protect me, for today I could betray you.”

14. Some Christians have been accused of being functional atheists because they live as if humans must do everything, or nothing will get done. The old-time Pentecostals had a saying: “Leave room for God.” Work, pray, and then watch what the Lord will do beyond our labors.

There is a related saying that goes something like this: “Pray as if only God can do it; work as if only we can do it.” That has some truth in it but also has something that tires my soul.

15. In the early 1900s, Corpus Christi’s newspaper was near bankruptcy. It could not pay its workers in cash, and its paychecks were worthless. Word got around that a certain large retail store would cash the newspaper’s paychecks, and they did. The way it worked was that the store cashed the checks, and then took the worthless paychecks to the newspaper where they bought advertising.

That is reminiscent of redneck society. In every group of rednecks there is sufficient talent to get anything done that needs doing, or someone knows a cousin’s friend who can do it. It’s remarkable how need brings us together into shared dependence, while luxury drives us apart into “I don’t need you” independence.

16. Have you accepted that the Lord loves you like you are, or are you trying to get yourself cleaned up enough so you can believe He loves you? How clean must that be? Must you be perfect before being loved by Him? Half perfect? It’s a heavy load, thinking of how much better we must be before He loves us, isn’t it? It’s even heavier trying to get that much better while feeling unloved.

How wonderful it is that He loves us like we are. “.. while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” – Romans 5:8. After we have absorbed some of His undeserved love, it becomes time to engage His process of cleaning up our internal and external behaviors. Our best motivation for that cleansing action is based on the soul-freeing and soul-relaxing truth that everything He does is done through His unconditional love for us. Everything changes in us as we begin to realize that the One who died for us is now involved in cleaning us, and that He is the Lord of everything.

If we don’t know His continual and undeserved love, we tend to become spiritual, emotional and cultural prunes, meaning we dry up from fear of making a mistake. The saint’s life is like the tortoise’s, there is no movement without first sticking our necks out. Mistakes will be made, but He has already paid the immense price for our comparably petty sins so that we may move boldly in faith. Even our faithless moves are covered in His blood. Jesus has given us Life to live even in our failures, and He will teach us to Live despite them.

If we insist on having a god who loves us only when we are good, there are several available. They can be googled under “gods.”

17. When a Jew invites you to eat with him, he is saying that he wants to know you better and have fellowship with you. That’s often the case with Gentiles, also. That’s what Zacchaeus the tax collector got so excited about – that miracle-working prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, announced right there before the eyes and ears of his neighbors and business associates that He wanted to stay the night at his house, undoubtedly including dinner and breakfast.

World, that same Jesus has invited us to His house, to sup at His table, and to live with Him forever. That’s quite an invitation.

18. I need soul adjustments. I’ll share one, in case you need one, too. Matthew wrote [5:23-24] that Jesus reviewed for them some of the basics of their animal sacrifice system. No surprise that it also speaks to the basics of Jesus’ sacrifice for us, and its application. Paraphrasing and updating from animal sacrifice to Jesus’ sacrifice, it reads: “When you are about to take communion, the Holy Spirit will be active among you. If He reminds you that there is a problem between you and another, don’t take communion without first going to your neighbor and getting things straight.” Good word. Soul adjusted. Perhaps I was the only one who needed to hear it.

For Jesus’ sacrifice for our daily sins to be applicable to us, we must confess our sins, be penitent, and attempt to rectify whatever consequences the sin had caused. That meant getting straight with our offended neighbor. If we are to suppose that we have been reconciled to the Lord when we ask Him for forgiveness, it will show in that we have reconciled with our neighbor whom we had also sinned against. If we have stolen something of our neighbor’s, it must be restored to him – meaning money, reputation, peace, time, etc.

The Jews understood this process. If the temple priest found that the sinner had not attempted to rectify his relationship with his neighbor, his sacrifice was not effective and was destroyed and burnt outside the temple. The Holy Spirit worked diligently to restore Israel to Jehovah and to one another, and continues working to restore the church to oneness in Christ – John 17.

19. I am spiritual family with a younger brother who is well above the average in his soul and in the workplace. He has his own business so is able to practice his heavenly sonship in-depth on the job. He does excellent work, he keeps his word, and he makes good, clear contracts with his customers. [Like “good fences make good neighbors,” “good contracts make good customers.”] But, for him, the equation goes: good contracts + good work + cross-bearing + personal godliness = working for the Lord. His workmanship is known for its excellence, so is much better than expected on the open market.

“Excellence means when a man or woman asks of himself more than others do.” – Jose Ortega y Gasset [1883-1955], Catholic, Spanish philosopher and essayist. There are soul blessings, this-life blessings, and in-heaven blessings that come with doing more than is necessary. Projects and relationships with whipped cream and a cherry on top are indicators of excellence.

20. A word of peace and encouragement: Saints, if you get discouraged by the condition of the church, which by God’s grace includes us, remember that God also had said big things to Abraham, the father of our faith, while he too remained fruitless in respect to God’s biggest promises. He lived by faith in his invisible God and His unfulfilled promises, not by his God’s fulfilled promises. Remember 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11.

Sarah [the church] was barren, but Abraham [God] was potent. As the church has become barren in so many ways [using God’s own word about what is normal for the church] it is good to remember that the Lord is not impotent. He can create a powerful church at any time, bringing forth many healthy children, and will do so in due time. The delay has nothing to do with the church, but everything to do with His plans and timing [that’s only my studied and experiential opinion].

Like Abraham and Sarah, the very things the church is doing, while having little or no fruit, will become fruitful in God’s time. In the meantime we should continue living and preaching the gospel. The barren church will bring forth life in God’s due time.

An additional word to us is, “Don’t try to force God’s hand,” as did Abraham and Sarah with Hagar, producing Ishmael who was a mixed blessing thereafter [very capable naturally but counter-productive spiritually]. Fertile Hagar [our always-available flesh] and impatient Sarah were granted the best that fit Abraham’s plans and produced that which appeared to be the fulfillment of God’s will, but was not. The word for us is to “lay low,” go easy on judging the church and ourselves, be faithful where we are and with what we have, trust the All-Mighty Head of the church, and keep our peace. We are on His schedule, things are being lined up, and fulfillment is on the way.

21. Sometimes names mean a lot in Scripture; sometimes apparently nothing. To complicate things, some names have more than one meaning. Joseph [“increase”] went to Egypt [“troubles”] where Pharaoh [“spoiler”] gave him a new name [Zaphenath-paneah, “Savior of the world”] and gave him Asenath [“misfortune”], the daughter of Potiphera [“demolishes the fat”] who was the priest of On [“pain”], for wife.

Let’s put the meanings of those names together into an already-informed sentence, which can be like making the Bible say whatever you want it to say. “A man who was anointed by God to establish prosperity was sent to an already troubled people who were threatened with greater ruin. The then-current spiritual leader, who was about to lead the people into starvation, had already been responsible for considerable misfortune. However, God’s anointed one saved the people, redeemed the spiritual leader’s previous misfortunes, and avoided a national calamity.

22. Growing older is simple; all one has to do is hang around and it happens. Staying married is not so simple; it requires attentiveness and work. Doing both simultaneously requires balance; a little self-focus and a lot of others-focus.

23. Not all of you know that I know all of you. I know you, Ralph, only from your cousin and from our e-mails. But I do know that every one of you has a good measure of Christ’s character and are still on the road toward becoming more Christ-like. It would be good to hear from a few of you about how you found both sin and grace along the way. No names will be used if I [possibly] edit and publish your contribution, but will use your initials unless you instruct otherwise. I need not be the only one who is encouraged by our communications.

24. Question: Do we want to end poverty [which we cannot do], or do we want people to flourish [which they can do]? Temporally, the best we can do is something like meet their immediate needs while preparing them for success, but it seems to be not working. Utopian thinking is “good thinking without God and His ways.” We will always have the poor, but we labor so hopefully it will not be the same poor from year to year and generation after generation. Much of our unwise and unloving charity perpetuates poverty, creating a permanent lower class.

25. “Don’t worry about the world ending tomorrow. It’s already tomorrow in Australia.” – Charles M. Schulz [1922-2000], American cartoonist, Lutheran, Church of God, United Methodist, self-described (and by others) secular humanist, and Sunday School teacher. Looking at his varied church background and his consistently Christian-based humor, it seems like he was looking for real Life but did not find all he was looking for. He may not have been exposed to it, or he may have been blinded to it, but he built his humor on the Christian principles of honesty and insightfulness [my observation].

26. Christians don’t need to understand one another’s motivations, don’t need to participate in one another’s ministries, don’t need to have the other’s vision of life and service in order to love one another, to be supportive of one another, and to refrain from negative thoughts and speech about one another. We can always be positive and helpful and stay united. All cannot be given over to everything, but we can love one another.

27. A new Texas law protects preachers’ rights to preach however they desire and on their own chosen topics. It is good to have civil government on the side of religious freedom, is it not? Who among us would turn down the blessing of civil government’s approval and permission?! But, to some pastors, this new law allows them to preach however they desire and on their own chosen topics, meaning they would have obeyed a restrictive law. Others would have disobeyed a restrictive law and preached freely.

If society and laws continue to deteriorate, it will not be long until again there are moves to restrict that which the church says and does, and again the church will turn to the state for relief. The more the church acknowledges [yields to] the state’s authority over its proclamation of the Word, the greater grasp the state has on the church. It should not be missed that increased dependence on the state simply delays the time of the church’s eventual cleansing through repentance, re-founding on the Rock, and Holy Spirit renewal. This time of increasing submission to the state prolongs our misery and delays the recognition of our sin – submission to Caesar. Eventual persecution will develop a believing and obedient remnant, which again will reveal God’s hand in the whole process.

28. Imagine this scenario: The church finds itself involved in a frank disagreement [rebellion] with God [well, not against God, only with what He says, as if that makes a difference] and doesn’t want to deal with it. Why not deal with it? Reasons: Dealing with the problem 1) consumes time and energy, 2) will cause loss of church members and money, 3) will give the church a bad reputation with those who do not know what God has said or with those who do not care what He has said or with those who know what He has said but disagree with Him, 4) requires disagreement and disharmony with others [and the church is to be a place of “love”], 5) requires exercising judgment [and “everyone, including God,” knows we are not supposed to exercise judgment], 6) requires having a standard and taking a stand based on that standard, and we don’t have a standard, 7) makes one seem hard and closed-minded, and we want to be inclusive, 8) focuses on the problem, making it more of a problem, 9) requires us to reconsider what God really meant when He said what He said [Genesis chapter 3 all over again], 10) is someone else’s responsibility, not mine and, 11) your own favorite excuse.

Kahill Gibran [1883-1931], Lebanese-American writer, poet and artist, Maronite Catholic, is the third best-selling poet of all time, behind Shakespeare and Laozi [ancient Chinese philosopher and poet]. He said, “Rebellion without truth is like Spring in a bleak, arid desert.” That calls for a few extra moments of thinking.

29. America’s forefathers knew that a virtuous citizenry was necessary for the stability of a free society. They warned America that once virtue ceased to prevail either in practice or as an ideal the laws would become “dead letters.” They warned that despots would rise up to rule over us if we did not know how to enjoy the blessings of our freedoms, that liberty would lead to licentiousness, and that laws would be passed to subvert every principle of law and justice. And why? To satisfy resentments and greed.

It’s easy to see those two things working today; they are on every newscast, and laws are passed to satisfy them. Politicians looking for votes foster divisiveness and greed and their voters demand the spoils of political victory. Because the church often aligns itself with the needy who are usually pawns in politics, the church can find itself unwittingly supporting unrighteousness instead of real solutions.

30. America has a lot of imprisoned citizens. Ideas of “why?” include: 1) Increased [excess?] criminalization, meaning that many things are now crimes that 30 to 50 years ago were not crimes, 2) an increase in minimum sentencing policies [mandatory sentences], 3) the failure of fatherhood [one study showed that 80-90 percent of inmates did not know their father or wished they had not known him, but more on this later], 4) lack of education [again, more on this later], and 5) limited socio-economic opportunity [family support, personal connections, successful examples, and tutors].

You noticed that there is no uniquely Christian expression of life listed as being lacking in the above reasons. You also know that Christianity as society’s leaven could have greatly influenced many of those prison inmates. Evangelism [leading to a change in one’s life directions] and conversion [becoming a disciple] are not designed to be experiences gained while isolated at special times and places, such as on Sunday mornings. A Christian’s workplace ministry [school teacher, coach, bus driver, waitress] changes things in the workplace, bringing peace and order to those who never enter the churchhouse. That sort of social leaven gives kids who grow up without a [reasonably performing] father, who are “different” from their neighbors who have whole and reasonably performing families, an opportunity to succeed.

If not corrected, that “fatherless difference” doesn’t last long. It, being a vacuum, brings something into existence. The fatherless tend to gravitate to those males who understand them, who will affirm and protect them. If those father substitutes are uncles, youth ministers, Scout leaders, and the like they are fortunate. If those father substitutes are gangs, whether organized or unofficial, they and their future generations are in major troubles. Needy kids and their equally needy friends share a sort of “bad medicine.” It is reasonable and natural that their mini-societies pass along their lifestyle and how to deal with life to their next generations. To them, they are the fulfilling norm.

Often, the God-given talents of the fatherless do not develop. However, as a modification of “do not develop” I will say that their God-given talents are often developed but are perverted. Gangs, for example, have remarkable levels of leadership, organization, group-care, commitment, and unity.

In regards to lack of education, I’m not saying it is entirely the fault of our public school system. Parents and other family members share responsibility for educating kids [learning attitudes, life’s aspirations, hopefulness, modeling, enforcing, can-do attitudes, and stick-to-it-tive-ness in relation to traditional schooling]. Lacking those essentials, they end up with poor decision-making skills. Stopping school is probably their first major bad-life decision, followed by a general unwillingness to listen to anyone.

31. “When a thing is done, it’s done. Don’t look back. Look forward to your next objective.” – General George Marshall [1880-1959], American military leader before, during and after WW II, statesman during the Cold War, recipient of the 1953 Nobel Peace Prize for economic recovery of Western Europe after WW II, and Episcopalian. General Marshall was a visionary and planner, two anointings required for certain types of leadership.

When Jesus said, “It is finished,” what had been accomplished was accomplished; the old system of animal sacrifice was superseded and was not to be continued. He had perfectly completed being its replacement, and more. No further animal sacrifices were needed or accepted as they had been needed and accepted. Animal sacrifice looked ahead in anticipation; the Lord’s Supper looks back in remembrance.

[I think that] if the Lord had continued animal sacrifice, but changed it into being a memorial until He returns, without it being of further edification, it would have been too easy for believers to attach further edification to it. That would have made it an Old Testament/Jewish trap, similar to circumcision. Christian Jews wanted to continue something other than faith; it gave their new belief in Jesus Messiah some “substance.” [I think that] the Lord changed from the animal sacrifice system as being a reminder of His death and sacrifice, to the Lord’s Supper of bread and wine as our present reminder, so that we would not bring out of the past more than a remembrance. The new and vital remembrance by bread and wine were to be reminders of those perfect and final acts of cleansing, restoration, etc. No old or new act, no enlargement or continuation of His sacrifice, could make His once and for all sacrifice more efficacious; in fact, it would be distractive. It is a reminder of Hist one sacrifice, never to be duplicated, extended, or improved upon, until He comes again.

32. “The intellect of the wise is like glass: It admits the light of heaven and reflects it.” – Augustus Hare [1834-1903], British biographer, Christian, raconteur, and historian. Sounds like brother A. H. was a student of Proverbs 1.

33. The world’s Jewish population is back up to pre-World War II levels. There are 16.5 million people who identify as either Jewish or part Jewish. It has taken 70 years for the Jews to replenish their numbers, after 6 million were killed in the Holocaust. [Compare to 70 years captivity in Babylon.] In Israel there are 6.1 million Jews, where they also have one of the world highest fertility rates. God bless our Jewish brothers!

34. In Daniel 10:10-13 we are shown that each country [city?, state?, county?, precinct?] has demons who regionally undermine God’s work. So, recently in Mexico, in the cathedral at San Luis Potosi, Cardinal Juan Sandoval Iniguez and other church leaders exorcised Mexico’s demons. It was a bold move of faith. Many will be watching to see possible results. Some watchers will be praying with them for those results. Some of those watchers will be Protestants.

Scripture teaches us that in the last days there will be an increase in demonic activity in the world. Stand together church, or we will fall further together.