THOUGHTS OF AUGUST, 2015

1. They are a wonderful and powerful combo: truth and love. The truth slices through untruth as light slices through darkness. Love never fails, but as it is gathered along the Way we find it to be very precious and expensive. In my experience, the truth was easier to come by than was love. Truth can be learned as a matter of fact, but love requires soul changes; sometimes sl-o-o-o-w coming soul changes. Truth matures our love and love purifies the truth. What a combo!

The truth is clear and unwavering. It can cut and slash mercilessly or mercifully, according to the surgeon’s expertise. In itself, truth has few variations. But love considers the heart [soft or hardened], mind [closed or open], and condition of the neck [whether stiff or supple] of the hearer.

Love customizes the truth according to the receiver. Learning the truth is easier for the disciple than is the customization of soul-changing love.

The truth alive in love brings down strongholds, disrupts the enemy’s plans, sends him screaming further into outer darkness, breaks his hold on reprobates, and sets the unworthies free to enter into Jesus’ joy. The truth in love is expensive, but available on our perfectly customized ways while bearing our crosses.

2. When the Lord snatched me up and plunged me into life with Him, He immediately put me into full-life involvement with 4 other men with whom He had done the same. We had families, so it was a group family action. It took a few years but we began to understand that He had come to earth [and into our individual/family lives] to form a body – His body. Each one of us was a part of that local body. We noticed that where we were [His formed local body], the eagles gathered – Luke 17:37. He attracted those who saw reality and were eager to lay down their lives in exchange for His abundant Life. More on this Thought in Thought No. 8 below.

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write about the wholeness and workings of Christ’s body, the church.

3. “A smile increases your face value.” That contribution comes from a fortune cookie. Fortune cookies are always right, if you have an adequate imagination.

4. Some essentials: 1) Make the Lord your everything, not your first priority. 2) Honor everyone, but don’t be a respecter of persons, meaning don’t be in awe of someone just because of their exalted position in government, church, society, etc. 3) Care for everyone as a person [it will show]. 4) Humbly relate to people, places, and situations from your sonship in the kingdom of God. If you are attacked, let it be because of your sonship. 5) Stay involved in civil government and other high places if that is where the Lord puts you. Speak up; don’t run, rebel, or compromise. 6) Pray from the high position of Jesus having made you His friend, acceptable to our Father, and attended to by the Spirit. Maintain your concern and thankfulness, but stop praying for something when you have the assurance that the Lord “has it in hand.” At that point, only thanking and praising Him is appropriate.

5. Have you noticed that apparent opposites can be completely compatible? That applies not only to people but to biblically scheduled events. When that happens we do not need to take sides theologically, but do need to see how both fit. Case in point: Before the Lord returns will the world see a great and powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit or will there be a mass falling away from the faith/truth? Answer: Both, simultaneously. For that to happen there will be a re-birthing of many millions of new souls while there is a landslide turning away from the truth.

It is noteworthy that that very situation is going on full-blast right now. The Lord is doing an amazing work in parts of the world that have never heard the gospel [or little of it], sweeping tens of millions into His kingdom. The main areas are Southeast Asia [China, India, Nepal, Laos, Vietnam, and Indonesia], Africa, and Latin America – those areas where the gospel had previously not taken root or flourished.

At the same time, churches in previously Christianized lands are falling away spiritually and numerically. Those who have ready access to and a heritage of the Good News are struggling. In them, watered down presentations of the gospel inoculate both unbelievers and believers against the Truth, the Way, and the Life, hardening their hearts. Deception in the church is rampant. With no leaven or light, society must degenerate, there being no other choice. Where there is spiritual life, more life is being given; where an abiding faith is refused, the vineyard shrivels. There is no Life off of the Living Vine. Reading Scripture only as part of a liturgical process leads to slow death. As life is in the blood, life is in the Spirit. That which they have is being taken away from them, while others receive in abundance – Matt. 25:29. The Lord Jesus spoke of these times, or “of times like these.”

Why have we not heard [much] about these two tsunamis? S-h-h-h; it’s a family secret. Daddy has closed the eyes and ears of the enemy to that which He is doing and of which He is preparing to do more abundantly. S-h-h-h! He is working under the radar. As usual, He is working for His sake, and working [mostly] in silence for our sakes. The parts of His workings that the world does see and hear seem as nothing to them. Persecutions and beheadings of Christians arouse no worldwide responses, but if of other religions there are loud protestations. S-h-h-h; we are on schedule for departure in the middle of the night. We are of the day so our eyes are open and we are prepared. The Lamb’s blood has been applied to the doors of our hearts. We are gathered together in our homes and are feasting on Him, with our shoes on, and we are ready to go. That being so; come, Lord Jesus.

6. “Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.” – John Wooden [1910-2010], American basketball player and coach, daily-Bible-reading Christian.

7. “We become what we think about.” – Earl Nightingale [1921-1989], American radio personality, writer, motivational speaker, one of 15 Marines who survived the sinking of battleship USS Arizona at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. See Philippians 4:8.

8. [This Thought is one presented to our Saturday Night Bible Study group on 8-8-15. Basically, it is a presentation from my heart to the group, on what they mean to me, and we to the Lord. It also applies to you and me, and to you and others who live-out the covenant established by Jesus’ blood and by the Holy Spirit’s alignment – 1 Cor. 12:18-26; Eph. 4:1-6.]

When the Lord snatched me up out of the pits of this life 52 years ago, He also plunged me into Him. Immediately He presented me with 4 other men in whom He had done the same. My and our focus was on the Lord Jesus, but we knew we needed one another in order to arrive at and accomplish that which the Lord was offering us. He presented us a choice that we could not turn down [death to self for unity in Jesus vs. alive to self for individual spiritual ministry] so we became the unity that He had prayed for on the night He was arrested [John 17] and then crucified. That commitment and unity made us leaders. All others who followed us into that local offering of Life had to make the same decisions and received the same life– despite each one’s individual background of society, finances, nationality, denomination, etc. All of those superficialities had to go in order for us to become His Father’s answer to His prayer – that living, breathing, human, sold-out oneness in Christ.

Last night, in a dream, I was back in that early group of immersed ones, enjoying the presence that we had been given and were then only beginning to pay for. There were no individually identified personalities in my dream but we were again together. [Three of the five of us are already home with the Lord.] It was a deep experience. Another dream immediately followed that one. It was of us, this Saturday Night Bible Study group. As in the first dream, we were not individually identifiable. What was identified was that we had the same spiritual “presence” as did those in the first dream. We had been given to one another, had chosen to be part of one another, were free to be or not to be part of one another, and were free to leave or stay. Our relationships were reliable but non-binding. We were without borders to hinder our coming or our going, as were Jesus’ disciples with Him and with one another.

We are a spiritual group. We have no in-common or compelling reason for being here or part of one another. We want to be here and have been gathered by the Lord. That gives us one identity – Him. He is our identity. That we are here on Saturday nights and do some studying of the Bible is obviously important to us, but we are here because we have been drawn together – possibly secondarily by other reasons such as being otherwise lonely on Saturday nights, or by wanting to give and receive Life from one another, or by our home being air conditioning, or by other good reasons – but we have been drawn together by the Lord, and we know it. He did it and He is among us in ways that He has decided to be among us. We are drawn. He has made us one with Him, with one another, and it is affecting our lives.

We have come to the Living Waters and are receiving rest for our souls. We are being shown how everything in our lives makes sense. That includes our worst past, our present intentions, and our indefinite future. That’s because we have fellowship with one another and our fellowship is with Jesus, the Light – 1 John 1:3. We have that Light and He is growing in us. Everything makes sense when we walk with the One who created all, who is delicately customizing everything, and who will not be moved aside from His purposes – including His purposes for us. That’s us personally and us corporately. We still have lots of good and semi-good, human, self-centeredness but He is showing us that real life is all about Him and will be found only in Him – not in us. Sometimes we think things like, “I can’t reach God,” “I found God,” “I held onto that promise,” and “I realized …” but He corrects us by the truth of His abiding, active presence. It’s all about Jesus; not “I,” “me,” or “us.” He has made us followers of Him.

We are the link between the dust of the earth and the clouds of heaven. We have no other reason for being, for gathering together, for shopping, for working our jobs, or for sleeping at night except that they were created for us to do them. Knowing that they are for His purposes satisfies us -- Matt. 11:26. Have you noticed the effects of that satisfaction? We are complete in Him. We have melodies in our hearts and always offer them up to the One who put them there – Eph. 5:19.

Dull repetition and long delays have lost their grip on us; so has sin. We get into and fall for those things, but they have lost their power over us – Rom. 6:6-7, 14.

It is difficult to do the following but try it: Let’s step back and take a look at our lives, including our relationships. Notice that we have no earthly reason for being who we are together. That is the clue to our identity. We are a family of spiritually re-born and growing people and we are part of the Lord’s eternal purpose revealed – Himself to the world in the church. He has made us part of that revelation of Himself – Eph. 1.

We can be seen by the church as being useless and rebellious [and, unfortunately, individually we can be exactly that], but we also can be seen by the same as those who live and function in the Spirit, walking as did Jesus. Toward that purpose, we are reliable, loving, peaceful, and spiritually alive.

Our trails show that we, too, fell for the devil’s lie to Eve, that we could become Christ-like and be pleasing to God if we would but first clean up our lives – “just enough.” That was a route to nowhere, we tried it, and [thankfully] failed, and knew we had failed. We found that being godly of our own workmanship was impossible, and that to have thought it was possible was big-time sin. We have been learning to keep our hands off of our souls, and off of others’ souls, and learning how to accept fellow sinners [both believers and unbelievers] while helping them choose life instead of death.

Instead, we are God’s workmanship. That is great news! We no longer think we need to be the masters of our own lives. We have Christ Jesus, the Master, alive within us. We are already the righteousness of God in Christ and by our trusting Him to finish it He is working Himself from our inside onto our outside. As we believe the inward truth we are becoming that truth outwardly. We are at rest.

When we are persecuted, slandered, etc. we bless, not curse or retaliate. We establish the standard of peace by being understanding and forgiving. We appreciate the standards of others, even if un-biblical [i.e., not drinking alcoholic beverages, no work on Sunday, not taking an oath in court, etc.], because the Lord knows best for them. We will not judge His servants or the quality of His workmanship among them. We accept His standards for ourselves, including the variable ones that we and others adopt [Romans 14], because some of us need adjustable borders in order to survive as humans and to live by the righteousness of faith. Adjustable borders are subject to change, but we live outside those borders. Those are adjusted only by faith in the truth as the Lord reveals it to those within them.

So, how do we get this right? If I told you, I would be a teacher of religion. In God’s opinion, when we love our neighboring orphans and widows in real ways, and avoid the wickedness of our peers, we are living pure religion. [That’s James 1:27, and notice how the Lord keeps things so simple for us.] Notice, also, that pure religion is not the definition of walking in the Spirit. Pure religion is the considered, theological, outworked way-of-life that can be developed from spiritual truth. Pure religion can be taught to both believers and unbelievers. It can be accepted and lived by both believers and unbelievers. It is righteous living through learning and living righteous precepts. If, for example, we were born into and raised by a righteous, spiritually alive family our character and behavior would show true religion. That is good, not bad. Many who are raised in the religious approach are brought to a walk in the Spirit; many are not, but may instead remain religiously successful. But without the Spirit and walking in faith in Jesus’ accomplished work, some will tire of even the purest of religion. Although both come from different directions, both approaches can lead to walking in the Spirit.

Walking in the Spirit requires our being chosen by God, His having put of Himself within us [of His Spirit because He is Spirit], thereby making us a forever member of His family, resulting in the development of our outer godliness through trusting Him to work His inward life into our character and behavior. That is in contrast to, but not necessarily in cross purposes with, coming to life in the Spirit by first living the righteous precepts of true religion. The pitfall of the first is that we may wander about in spiritual limbo without ever forming true religion or much of it. The pitfall of the second is that we may continue with true religion without ever coming to a walk in the Spirit, in which case we are left in our religion, a beneficial form of self-chosen righteousness.

Which is right if both lead to a walk in the Spirit? Both? Would you rather have [we are not given this choice] the Holy Spirit for your Guide or have mature leaders and teachers as your guides? When faced with that non-choice, Jesus’ disciples wanted to keep Jesus, their true religion leader and teacher, but He left and turned them over to the Holy Spirit for a walk with Him.

Which route leads to best results? It’s the Lord’s decision. We are His workmanship.

9. “I have learned that the best way to lift one’s self up is to help someone else.” -- Booker T. Washington [1856-1915], American educator, writer, orator, and advisor to American presidents. That matches with the observation that in order to succeed we need only to make those under us happy. They will lift us up. In the process we will be making the One over us happy.

10. Along the line of keeping our eyes and ears open [being informed “circumspectly” – Eph. 5:13-17], while guarding our hearts and minds, and keeping a righteous attitude, the report is that some Iraqi Christians who were fleeing the Islamic State made their way to America, seeking safety and freedom. Instead of being welcomed in as religious refugees, they were arrested and sent to a San Diego prison. That is despite the fact that 300,000 immigrants from Muslim countries were welcomed into America last year.

Now remember; don’t let either correct or incorrect information contribute to an unrighteous attitude. Do whatever is appropriate but keep your soul clean.

11. Last year China began a campaign of removing the cross from the churches and from the public eye in general. As a result, there have been peaceful protests, both within and outside of China. Usually, “peaceful” protests mean they are non-violent physically. Can’t you hear the Lord Jesus saying, “But I say to you, peaceful protests also means that you have love in your hearts for those who are persecuting you, that you are praying for them, and are humbly submitting to them” – Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-35, 38-39, 43-44. It’s good that we don’t stick our finger in our persecutor’s eye, but not good enough if we want to be “like our Father in heaven,” and desire to become overcomers.

Here is another example of The Way or the flesh way. America’s [et. al.] nuclear inspection non-treaty with Iran bars the revealing of its side deals to the American Congress or public. There are side deals that are neither public nor subject to review by the United States Congress. I can feel my flesh’s temperature rise when our Constitution is circumvented secretly by the few. Prompt, firm, and organized action is often called for by Christians while we keep watch over our souls.

Also, we have become so non-judgmental that we no longer know right from wrong, good from evil. In our attempt to be nicer we have become amoral. As we become “more tolerant” we become less good, less strong and less free. Our lack of clear-minded, well-stated morality will sink us as a nation.

12. “Surround yourself with the best people you can find, delegate authority, and don’t interfere as long as the policy you’ve decided upon is being carried out.” – Ronald Reagan [1911-2004], 40th U.S. president, Presbyterian brand of Christian.

13. “If things seem under control, you are just not going fast enough.” – Mario Andretti [1940-present], naturalized Italian-America race car driver. That quote is included just for your entertainment and personal evaluation.

14. Profound moments and events can be the most fleeting of times, passing quickly and with little comment. Some of them in Scripture are treated as if “in passing.” There may have been considerable build-up to the event, but when it happened it was over, like “now let’s move on to the next thing. “ Perhaps that’s because of the profundity of it, leaving nothing more to be said. When the resurrected Jesus showed Himself to doubting Thomas [John 20:26-29], Thomas’ response is simply, “My Lord and My God.” There was nothing else recorded, or mentioned later elsewhere in Scripture. Yet, Thomas’ and Jesus’ encounter was profound in its effect.

On two occasions I have heard the angels singing praises to the Lord Jesus, at length, partly with the congregation’s high praises and partly with only their own voices. Others also heard and understood. A few of us, weeks later, briefly shared our common experience; then we stopped talking about it. It was too profound to be cheapened with further discussion.

When I was granted the opportunity to see and talk to Jesus it was the same way. For the longest time I spoke nothing to anyone about it. It still affects me that way, like it is best to leave it alone. Its effect has been permanent. It’s like a precious gem that is stored away in a vault, perhaps taken out on special occasions, but always “present.”

15. Coram Deo: The essence of the Christian life. To live Coram Deo is to live one’s entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God. Who would choose otherwise?!

16. How do we, in the church and in the marketplace, go about choosing leaders? Isn’t it reasonable to consider resumes, seniority, image, education and many other things? I’m going to make a suggestion, but it is not meant to replace those tools. It is meant to adjust them, to be placed among them and, things being somewhat equal, possibly atop them. It was King David’s approach to choosing leadership – 1 Chronicles 11:6. David chose the one who went first to the battle, and to the most difficult place of battle. He chose the one who”knew he could,” the one who earned leadership the old fashioned way – by being it.

Then take some time to think how others thought of David’s offer: “That sounds too radical.” “My, how dangerous!” “That might not work.” “What will people think if I try and don’t succeed?” “I don’t want a failure on my resume” [Abe and Winston didn’t think that way]. I have heard all of those thoughts.

17. Who do you place at or near the top of a list entitled: “Those who believe the Bible is God’s word?” No. 1 is God Himself. Then? Remember that we are not talking about believing without acting accordingly; which is death. The Lord’s definition of believing requires “living and acting upon.” That’s why we put God Himself at the top of that list because He acts upon and according to His word. He submits Himself to that which He has said – Ps. 138:2.

Then, who is next? How about No. 2 being the devil and his other evil angels? They absolutely believe, and must act accordingly continually. They must submit to God’s word when spoken by someone who believes/lives that word. They quiver when a believer begins to live God’s word. They have already been defeated by the One who believed and lived. Now they must submit to God’s word as other believers/livers step up.

18. From a previous Thought: Who is the Holy Spirit listening to in John 16:13? Who triggers His speaking? What is He listening for? It is clear that He is listening, guiding believers, speaking only the truth, waiting to hear the truth before He speaks, definitely will speak, and that all of that is directed toward us. But who is He listening to in order to insert the living truth into a situation, to speak to involved believers and unbelievers and the devil? That could be me, you, us. What is He waiting to hear?

19. We are placed in life in order to come to a full knowledge of God and be changed into His likeness, which will not be accomplished in our current condition of this earth-life. There is more opportunity to come after we leave this situation. One of the earth-situations into which we are placed in order to know Him better is the awareness that He, the entirely righteous One, is running the entire confused and evil world. He is orchestrating everything. Job knew that and still is teaching it to us – Job 1:21-22; 2:10; 13:15. All is designed to squeeze us, to reveal Him to us, and to leave us no excuse for our self-chosen behavior, bringing us to our knees, aware of our emptiness of any form of righteousness, aware of our hopeless condition, ready to face Him and accept Him as our Savior.

There are many other God-designed impossibilities along the way. One is that He sends us out on a mission that, unknown to us, He has designed to fail – if we have the wrong idea about what is going on during our mission, what we are to do, what the results are to be, and [ultimately] whether we know Him and His ways. Just as Jesus “failed” in His mission to Chorazin and Bethsaida [Matt. 11:20-26], we too are sent to “fail.” Jesus held those people personally responsible for their lack of response, but knew that His Father was the one in charge. Knowing that, Jesus was simply and magnificently satisfied. He did not need to know any further details.

Consider Moses’ situation – carefully designed and orchestrated by the Lord. Pharaoh’s decisions were in the hand of God, no matter how Pharaoh tried to cooperate with Moses – Ex. 7:3. So it was also with Joshua – Josh. 11:20. And with our trunk, the Jews – Rom. 11:all. What a problem to our flesh! We have much to learn, and it must begin with acknowledging our emptiness and depravity.

20. It’s not who you are, or who you are not, that holds you back, but who you think you are not. Correcting that thought process can improve our slave mentality.

21. “Any organization, in order to survive and achieve success, must have a sound set of beliefs on which it premises all its policies and actions.” – Thomas Watson, Jr. [1874-1956], American businessman and philanthropist, Methodist. That is a sound Christian principle which should be carried outward from the church house into the marketplace, and not only by the business owners. All marketplace Christians should be girded about with clearly understood and firmly applied righteousness.

22. When the Lord first makes spiritual creatures of us, and gifts us with spiritual gifts, it can take some time and encouragement before we step out and serve-up those spiritual offerings. It was helpful to me that He surrounded me with equally spiritual and new brothers and sisters whose knees wobbled as much as did mine. One grey-head among us was of great help to all. Earle knew how to encourage us to live and speak beyond ourselves.

“It takes a lot of courage to show your dreams to someone else.” – Emma Brombeck [1927-1996], American humorist, Christian in the grain of the United Brethren and Roman Catholicism.

23. I think that the Moslems have had a solid record for remembering, and not giving up, after long centuries of having not accomplished their objectives. Perhaps that is rooted in their noted lack of true peace and lack of being able to forgive from their hearts. Hatred and resentment can hold lots of memories.

The Arabs had long been the center of innovation and wealth. Until the 12th century their per capita income was higher than that of Europe’s. Then Europe moved ahead of them. The basic reason for that shift is thought to have been rooted in the matter of trade. The Middle East used to be the center of trade for the world, but eventually the discovery of America and the Horn of Africa shifted the center of trade to Europe.

For a long time, the Middle East did not recognize that it was stagnating and that Europe was moving ahead – until the Europeans began colonizing the Middle East region and the trade routes. After that, our higher level of modernization placed them at a distinct disadvantage. That Western “higher level“ is now being challenged big time as our Western culture and religion are stagnating and the Moslems are in turn colonizing us. Déjà vu?

24. How many Israelites died [committed suicide] at Masada in 73 AD? More than is generally known – 73,960. Their choice was death at their own hands or slavery to the Romans. Greatly because of that historic event, present-day Israelites have a “Masada complex,” verbalized as “Masada shall never fall again.” Mix that with their “Samson complex” and it is easier to understand their stance against their many enemies, and with their differently-experienced sometimes-friends such as Europe and America.

25. A beloved saint, Bonnie Myers Colton, mom of C. C. B., died recently. She had written the following poem 30 years ago.

THIS OLD WOOD

Like this old wood, my life shows stain

Of creeping flaws within the grain.

Yet, the Creator looks and sees

A thousand possibilities

And brings forth beauty from disease.

Like this old wood, beneath Love’s hand,

I am transformed in ways not planned.

And another of her poems which, for a known reason, touches my soul:

COUNTRY DOCTOR

"He's just a country doctor."

They say it with a smile,

For he has kept them healthy

Over many a year and mile.

He's never been too busy

To see a child that's sick.

And if you had an accident,

He'd be there mighty quick.

He's just a country doctor

From a disappearing breed.

He takes his calling seriously--

To meet each urgent need.

He welcomed each new baby

With almost a parent's pride,

And comforted survivors

When an elder loved one died.

He's just a country doctor,

But his vision spans the years.

His memory sees a thousand lives

In pain and toil and tears.

And yet his sense of humor

Can banter with the best.

The years have brought him wisdom.

His life has stood the test.

He's just a country doctor

Who does the best he can.

But that's not all -- beyond that,

He's a loved and trusted man.

You need not be a country doctor or a man for that to apply to you, especially if you are a grey-head.