THOUGHTS OF OCTOBER, 2014

1. If the insightful awareness of our own weakness of body and soul is not enough to keep us humble, the results of our performances should help. Last month, Thought number 22 reminded us that the accuracy of our self-esteem is both enhanced and controlled when we let others do most of the evaluations for us. At least their help should keep us humble.

2. We need more saints who are devoted to the Lord of the church, and to the church – in that order. If our devotion becomes greater to the church than to the Lord, the church flounders. It loses its godly values and becomes addicted to the opiate of institutional survival, sometimes at any cost. When the organization [the church] becomes more important to us than the Lord and His headship, it is doomed to shrivel and die. Then the more it strives to be more relevant and to be all things to all people, the more it looks like and becomes like the society it was sent to change. Not wanting to be “different,” especially not wanting to be a “religious fanatic,” is a major problem in the church.

3. Good words beguile us so easily. That’s often because we want to believe those words. On the other hand, we sometimes reject good words because, for example, they are too good to be true. Jesus helped us with this word problem by telling us to believe accomplishments [deeds] and fruit [character]. He said, “By their fruit you shall know them” – Matt. 7:15-20. He immediately followed that advice by showing us how He will take His own advice when He judges Christians [which is of our deeds and character] – Matt. 7:21-23. He will not be duped by Christians’ big words or even by our big [but lawless] deeds. It will be by our obedient [Spirit-led] service and Christ-like character that we will be ushered into the millennial kingdom with His judgment of “Well done.”

Nicholas Sparks [1965 to present], American novelist, screenwriter and producer, accomplished college-level track athlete, hushed philanthropist, and Christian said, “You’re going to come across people in your life who will say all the right words at all the right times. But in the end, it’s always their actions you should judge them by.” That’s spreading the gospel in the workplace.

4. Do you lock your doors when you go to bed at night? Why? Has anyone ever tried to break in during your sleep? If “No,” then why continue to expect the possibility of that which has never happened to you? Has your expectancy of a break-in diminished due to its non-occurrence? That would be reasonable, but unreasonable to not lock the doors in most of our neighborhoods.

Compare the level of your expectancy of Jesus’ return. You continue believing that He will return, and at any time, although He still has not returned. Has His delay reduced or stopped your expectation? I am confident that my, your and the church’s expectation of His imminent return is less than Peter’s, John’s and the others in the first years of the church.

Thirty-three years after Jesus had re-ascended to heaven, Peter wrote that we should be patiently expectant – 2 Peter 3:1-18. That is the norm. We know He is coming.

Unbelief in His return can be easily tolerated from unbelievers outside the church, but sometimes we wilt from the unbelief of unbelievers within the church. The return of Jesus our Messiah is eminent. The question is not if He will return, but when. The God who spoke creation into existence, and warned humanity that a flood was coming in Noah’s day, has also said that He will return to earth to judge everyone and all things, and set up His earthly kingdom.

Pray, work, and patiently expect Him. He cannot lie – Matt. 24:1-51.

5. The three important things, faith, hope and love, are highly !! susceptible to lies told us by our own flesh. The originating source of those lies comes from Satan usually through our feelings, into our minds. After we have developed a bit of habit in that weakness, Satan doesn’t have to bother us any more in that area. We have decided that God’s truth is not as truthful as Satan’s lies.

If we feel deserted by God, we think we are deserted by God. We even acknowledge that the challenge to God’s truth is coming through our flesh by way of our feelings, saying “I feel deserted by God,” accepting the lie as a fact. The lie, the feeling, the acceptance of the feeling as truth, plus some time and experience to concrete it into our souls, makes it permanent.

The answer: The truth. God will never desert us. He said so. That which we feel does not change His character.

Some common thought patterns: 1) “I have no vision or purpose; I have no reason to go on.” 2) “I feel spiritually dead, and have for 3 minutes/hours/days/weeks/months/years.” 3) “I don’t feel able to reach God anymore.” 4) “I no longer know what is going on in my life.” 5) “Jesus told us that He would never leave or forsake us, but I feel like He has.”

There is nothing wrong with talking about our heart attack or broken toe – or how we feel in our feelings, but our feelings and other troubles have nothing to do with the truth of God’s word. Truthfully, we feel like He has forsaken us when we feel like He has forsaken us. Truthfully, we feel He no longer loves us when we feel He no longer loves us. Truthfully, we feel all sorts of things, but the truth of whether He has or has not is that He has not forsaken us and has not stopped actively loving us and working in our behalf, no matter how we truly feel.

6. “Every adversity, every failure, every heartache carries with it the seed of an equal or greater benefit” – Napoleon Hill [1883-1970], American author and promoter of personal success. He did not quote Romans 8:28, and I don’t know if he knew that verse, but speaking and living the truth is common in a society when it has been Christianized, as was his.

7. Why did Jesus give responsibility for His mother to John when He was on the cross about to die? Joseph was nowhere on the scene, and is thought to have died sometimes between Jesus’ 12th and 30th birthdays, so Scripture directed that the oldest and then the next oldest son should be responsible for the widowed mother. Why not give that family responsibility to one of His several half-brothers who were full-sons of Joseph and Mary? Was it simply because John was a better care-giver, or better person, or had greater means? Had John and Mary already established a good son-mother-type relationship? Did He calculate that the young man, John, was more likely to outlive Mary than were the older others? Or was there some other reason? My educated guess is that Jesus’ considered His spiritual family to be His primary family and that it was better qualified -- more loving, more kingdom-oriented, and more righteous than His half-brothers.

8. Why is Christianity the most free and freeing religion where it is lived, preached and taught correctly? Suggested answer: “So we can be the most that the Lord wants us to be.” Then comes the question: What does He want us to be?” Easy answer: “He wants us to be the exact image of Jesus, God’s Son.” Jesus loved His Father enough to go where His Father wanted Him to go, do what He wanted Him to do, and be how He wanted Him to be. That pattern is offered to those who love Him as sons should love fathers, especially our Father.

So many times I have known that the Lord told me what to do, but I knew I did not need to do it. Usually I did it, but only because I loved Him. Many times He simply offered me opportunities, without their being commands. Again I obeyed Him only because I loved Him. I will have to say that as the years have passed and my love-based obedience improved into being part of my nature [a kingdom habit], there has been less “think about it” time. Growing up has been a freeing process – free [-er] from my flesh year by year.

Our mutual love was and is the power and reason for living free. You have noticed that the same process goes on between us in God’s family, and then overflowing toward those who are not in the family. If we love Him we will keep His commandments – John 14:23; 1 John 2:5, 24; 2 John 6.

“Freedom means the opportunity to be what we never thought we would be” – Daniel Boorstin [1914-2004], American historian, Librarian of the United States Congress, Pulitzer Prize recipient, holder of 20 honorary degrees, and Jewish. Once more the Jews are right.

9. Do not follow the rest of society as they succumb to the deceptions that permeate society. It is interesting and almost exciting to make a list of those deceptions, grade the power of each one as you see it [like from 1 to 10]; then sit back and ask the Lord to show you how you are doing. That can give some clear understanding and direction on what is really going on in life. If you want to hear more clearly how you are doing, ask your spouse to grade you, or a friend, or an “enemy.”

10. Halloween is coming, and will have been gone when you receive this edition of THOUGHTS. For some it is a time of fun; to others an invitation to at least peek into the occult. 50% of Americans will decorate for Halloween, compared to over 80% who will decorate for Christmas. Halloween is now the third biggest party time, after the Super Bowl and New Year’s Eve.

Halloween can be a difficult time for Christians, especially for parents of small children. The Bible tells us to shun occult practices. Halloween has a pagan background, partly or completely, according to who is keeping the history record. Be warned about young minds being desensitized to evil, especially in fun and innocent ways.

11. 2032 will be approximately 2,000 years since Jesus was resurrected. Stay prepared.

12. We certainly do have to watch out for deception, some of which are so obvious, if they make a difference to us [meaning if we desire to live a holy life we won’t be so easily fooled]. Words are being re-defined. New terms are coming into print, one of which is “predatory taxes.” At first bite, I’m certainly against those predatory taxes, because the term sounds like “high taxes that eat into your budget.” However, predatory taxes is the new term being applied to low taxes. The situation is that some states have lower taxes than other states have. The higher tax states don’t like that because companies and people and money tend to move away to the low tax states. Thus, the lower tax states are accused of having “predatory taxes.” So, what are the high tax states doing? They are turning to the federal government to make all state taxes the same, meaning high.

Why talk about taxes? The above “solution” is common among people when we have sin working in our lives. We look about to see how others are doing with that same sin. If they are doing the same thing as we are, our flesh is happy. On taxes and sin we tend to go for the worst common denominator and allow our flesh to run wild. In either case, when we compare ourselves to one another we are practicing carnality. When we compare ourselves to the Lord, we are practicing righteousness.

13. Information on Adam’s first mistake [not meaning his first sin] is given us in Genesis 3:1. God had told him to rule over all of the animals [1:26-28]. In 2:15 God told him to cultivate and keep the garden. “Keep” carries the meaning of “care for” including “protect.” You will recall that the Garden of Eden was not the whole of the world. Outside and around the garden was “the field,” where things were different from inside the garden. Notice that the serpent had been placed in “the field” but had entered the Garden. For this little Thought we are imagining that Adam had let a field animal into the Garden, thus had not “kept” it. That was his first mistake, which set up Eve’s deception and his sin. Our association with sin and sinners should be governed by God’s wisdom and love.

14. I want to get into sync with something the rabbis of old have said about the Lord rehabilitating the earth back to its condition as before the flood of Noah’s day:

From Adam’s time until the flood the earth had a canopy of water in some form entirely encircling it. There was no rain until the flood [Gen. 2:4-6] when that canopy came down and the water within the earth came out [Gen. 7:4, 11-12]. The canopy had filtered out the harmful rays of the sun, possibly allowing for the longer lifespan of humanity from Adam until Noah. You have noticed that the life span of humanity rapidly diminished after the flood until the time of Abraham, when it again stabilized – Gen. 11:10-32.

The Old Testament rabbis understood from Scripture that when the Messiah came He would restore all things. Their thinking included the restoration of the earth’s surface and atmosphere as it was during Adam’s until Noah’s day. In Matthew 19:28 Jesus spoke of His [and others’ with Him] reign during the millennium, adding that there would be a regeneration/new world at that time. Could be!

15. One of my most honest times of prayer was about 25 years ago. Nancy had metastatic ovarian cancer and, after debulking surgery [removal of the main mass of the cancer], was given 20 to 40 months to live, with chemotherapy treatment. On my knees I told the Lord that He was the All-mighty and that I knew nothing could touch her body [or my body, or anyone’s body] unless He directed it, and that her cancer [and all else] was designed for His glory and her eternal betterment.

Then, I did not ask Him to heal her. I told Him that His plans are perfect and that I did not want Him to change even the smallest part of His plans for her or for me. Face to face with Him, I told Him that no matter what He did, I would love Him and serve Him the remainder of my life. Then, even though I knew He already knew my innermost thoughts and desires, I told him that [for me to be verbally honest and complete] it surely would be good to have her with me longer.

One month after her surgery, after only one chemotherapy treatment -- examination, C-T scan and blood tests showed no evidence of cancer in her body. He healed her.

16. The cross-walk is designed to bring us, the condemned, to the end of ourselves. But, because we continually dig up our corpses and try to resuscitate them, the cross must also be able to destroy us.

17. Have you noticed that it is sometimes difficult to be and do what the Lord wants of you, often due to peer and other pressures from a world that is constantly trying to make you into something other than the Lord’s purpose for you? The Lord’s way is clear, the world’s pressure is almost constant, and our noticing the difference is variable. I consider it a great accomplishment of God and myself when we no longer wrestle [much] over simple and superficial do’s and don’ts sins but get deeper into my soul where the real action is. When I see that deeper work going on I am encouraged.

18. Have you fellow-Americans noticed something else, that one of the many redefinitions of words and political meanings has to do with that which is meant by “separation of church and state?” It really means that the state must leave the church alone, but has been twisted 180\* to mean that the church must leave the state alone – that the church must get out of all things of the state. That’s another example of the spirits of the air at work.

19. In my group studies of Scripture we often speak of “not spinning sin” and “not twisting Scripture.” We want the Holy Spirit to have souls who are open to His conviction and revelation. Here is another example of how a Christianized world or person is grasped by truth: “If you want to be successful, you must respect one rule: Never lie to yourself.” – Paulo Coelho [1947-present], Brazilian novelist and song writer, lightweight Catholic.

20. And another: “The free soul is rare, but you know it when you see it – basically because you feel good, very good, when you are near or with them.” – Charles Butowski [1920-1994], German-born American short story writer, poet, novelist, and wandering Catholic.

21. “If you are dependent on money you’re never going to have enough; if you’re dependent on God you will always have enough.” -- Ron Blue [1942-present], successful entrepreneur in the financial services industry, admired leader and speaker on the topic of biblical financial management. His presentations and their results show that biblical wisdom is timeless, authoritative and it speaks to every financial situation anybody has in their life.

Here is the solution to a quandary that you have been waiting to hear, on whether to give or not give: The only way to break the power of money over you is to give. It really is more joyful to give than to receive, especially when you give until it hurts, then continue until it stops hurting. God is not interested in our money; He is interested in our hearts and He uses our money as a tool to get to our hearts.

22. What is it that you most often have to remind yourself of? That every day brings your eternal rewards another day closer? To choose faithfulness as you move from opportunity to opportunity? To hold fast to God’s word when there are other and easier choices? To not fear, despite increasingly fearful circumstances at hand and approaching from far away? To recognize evil, and resist it while extending love? To not focus on the crashing waves and our own weaknesses, but on His faithfulness?

23. To whom should we attribute the killing of Jesus? Was it the Romans [yes], or the Jews [yes], or me [yes], or the devil [yes], or His Father [yes]? If anyone does not know the accuracy of that answer, write me.

24. To the best of my recollection, I have never considered any part of Scripture to be outdated or non-applicable. I have pondered over lots of it, wondering if and how it applied, but eventually agreed with the Lord that it applied to me – the New Testament directly and the Old Testament either directly or allegorically. There is Life in every chapter, often in every verse. One blessing in that approach, which indicates an appreciation for the Lord’s rescuing me from out of the pit, is that it has kept me from relating to the more instructive scriptures as being “legalistic.” Instead, they say, “do this and Live.”

25. “People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.” – Elisabeth Kubler-Ross [1926-2004], Protestant, Swiss-born American psychiatrist. She had a reasonable but non-religious approach to euthanasia, believing that it prevents people from completing their unfinished business.

26. “Minds are like parachutes; they work better when open.” – Thomas Dewar [1864-1930], Scottish businessman, politician [MP], Sheriff of London, breeder of winning thoroughbreds. There are lots of solid accomplishments in that short list.

27. All of us have met people, including that sometimes-stranger in the mirror, who have been hurt deeply by someone [including the Lord, “for allowing that to happen to me”]. Hebrews 3:10 tells believers that we are in trouble with Him when we don’t know His ways. We don’t know that He is the architect of all of life and our enabler to live obediently and faithfully as we go through our “grow up!” wildernesses. Thus we complain and die [spiritually] in our tests instead of passing them and pressing on into His more full promises.

Scripture substantiates that the Lord cannot use a person much until he/she has been hurt seriously. Our flesh wants life to be blessings with only occasional and small trials in which we curse the devil and he flees from us, returning life to my desired [short sighted and immature] normal. But God never hurries. He has all of our years in this earth-life and the 1,000 years in Christ’s kingdom on earth to bring us to where He wants us. During those 1,000 years we will also benefit from 20/20 hindsight, seeing what could have been easier and quicker accomplished. At this time, unbelieving believers can reject His grace and decline His rewards, which we will regret, but He will get us home and accomplish His purposes with each of us.

I never thought that I would comfort those with whom the Lord is actually angry – Heb. 3:10.

28. This is dangerous territory. It’s dangerous because it could border on unrighteous judgment. My Thought is that weakness in Christian formal ministry is often because those ministers have entered their particular ministries upon their own choice, not God’s. Just like He chooses those whom He will [Rom. 9:6-26; 11:7-10, 25; Matt. 13:10-17; Ex. 4:21; John 15:16], He chooses those whom He will place in particular ministries and locations, and their timing [1 Cor. 12:11, 18; Acts 13:1-4, 16:6-10; 18:9-11].

Remember that unrighteous judgment is unrighteous because of its unrighteous attitude, not because it is factually wrong.

29. There is a dynamic tension between the relative importance of “the church” and “Jesus.” In some churches you hear about being faithful to the church, and that in the church abides all the necessary elements for salvation of mankind. Other churches emphasize Jesus as the only and active Savior, and that in Him abides all the necessary elements for salvation of mankind. I mean that some emphasize the church as God’s means of saving the world, and others emphasize only Jesus Himself as that means. Some preach faithfulness to the church, some preach faithfulness to Jesus. I am confident that you ole timers have it straight, and that for you there is no tension between the two foci. But have you noticed that those who over-focus on the church lose spiritual power, and that those who over-focus on Jesus are without spiritual order? The mis-focus is not necessary. Jesus is the Life; the church is His commissioned schematic and purveyor of the Life. Jesus focuses on the church and the church focuses on Jesus.

30. I was sharing with some brothers today that “speaking the truth” is not always appropriate; that “speaking the truth in love” is also not always appropriate; but that “wisely speaking the truth in love” is always appropriate, or close to it. Then I read something said by Lady Dorothy Nevill [1826-1913], British writer, hostess, horticulturist, plant collector, and conversationalist, which went: “The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.”

31. It is easy to understand the objection of unbelievers when they hear us say that Jesus is the only way to the Father. They charge us with being unloving, exclusive, and narrow-minded. Actually, we and Jesus are loving and broad minded. “Who-so-ever to the Lord may come” is broad-minded, as is inviting all to come to the only Way.

32. Think on this honestly yet softly about yourself: Jesus said His Father loved Him, therefore showed Him all things that He [His Father] was doing – John 5:20. That sets me to thinking that our Father will inform us of that which He has done, is doing, and will do according to our obedience to and dependence upon Him – v. 19. So, if I am obeying and depending on Him, meaning that I am taking Him and His words seriously, I will know what is going on in creation, especially as it applies to me. Then I can get into even better and more deliberate step with Him.

33. Some Thoughts on social Welfare in America – its roots, condition and direction (?). This will be very much condensed.

America has earned the reputation of being the most generous nation in the world. We defeat our enemies in battle, and then restore them. We are the major responders to the world’s natural disasters, by far, providing private and governmental aid, and we ask nothing in return. People of other nations are flooding across our borders seeking work or public assistance, risking death in the process. [For those most unfortunate, we even identify their remains and send their bodies back to their families.] We provide for our poor beyond the imagination of those who are poor in other countries.

What is the source of such benevolence? How did such a measure of generosity capture the soul of America? What stirs our remarkable responses to others’ needs? Also, are there controls and limits?

First, the source of our benevolence:

The Lord God laid the groundwork for social welfare among His people through Moses beginning in Old Testament days 3,500 years ago. There were several major aspects of His Law that reached deeply into every part of Israeli society and more intimately into the hearts of every Israelite family. Although those and other expressions of God’s concern for His people were for their sake, the purpose of His kindness was to make the nation of His people righteous, responsible and successful – like Him. His efforts to stir their love for Him and for one another were aimed toward laying a firm foundation upon which He could eventually build a spiritual kingdom in this world among the various earthly kingdoms. That foundation was summarized 1,500 years later by Jesus Christ when He said we are to love God with everything we are and have, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Then He gave Himself to us as that Foundation.

To the other questions:

Americans are “people of the Book.” That book, the Bible, shows that beginning about 1,500 B. C. God’s people had temple priests who ran their God-instructed national welfare system. Those priests continually received large amounts of food [meat and grain] for temple sacrifices. Some they burned as offerings to God, some they kept for themselves, but the much larger amount they distributed to the poor. This was an effective system, in part because the priests lived throughout the nation and rotated regularly through temple duty in Jerusalem. While home they also distributed money that had been collected at the temple. They spent their greater time among their “constituents,” seeing and verifying needs of the poor and overseeing the distribution of food and money from Jerusalem. Note that this part of the welfare system was religious, not civil, and may be compared to the duties of the church.

The civil government, headed by a king, was not part of the welfare system. More on this later.

At the same time there was another welfare arrangement, a parallel system that was personal, not centered in organized religion. The part we will look at most closely here is the responsibility of relatives toward widows and orphans – the responsibility of the family for the family. The nearest and most elder kinsman of a deceased brother was required to step into the lives of impoverished relatives, to redeem them from their situations, and see to the restoration of their land. Widows and orphans were of central focus – Deuteronomy 25:5-10. The nearest kinsman of a deceased brother or relative was to take the widow to wife and raise up children in his deceased kinsman’s name, or could pass that responsibility to the next kinsman in line. This was the “redeemer kinsman” process.

The Messiah came 1,500 years after that system was instituted. He, being the Word of God who had given those instructions, presented insights into those welfare rules that pierced the hearts of those who were not right with God or with the poor. His insights revealed the true application of the Law through Moses, that true, wisely and practically applied love would make all of life work God’s way, which is better than anything man could devise, especially through civil governments. Again, more on social welfare by civil government later, our focus here being on church and family responsibility.

After Christ, the New Testament writers encouraged generosity; even requiring exemplary generosity if a person was to be a leader in the church. They wrote things to the church like, “.. if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Not surprisingly, godly exercise of responsibility to one’s nuclear and broader family was and still is an expression of one’s character in our Christian society.

As with the priests who were scattered throughout Israel, the church is scattered throughout America. Proper welfare decisions, especially long-term remedies, are best made by face-to-face contact and long-term commitments such as can be established by the church and among family members. It was therefore easy for writers of the New Testament to balance their instructions on generosity versus thriftiness with, “.. if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.” Charity was local and very personal, not careless. Distant governmental agencies cannot and will not give that sort of oversight or make those kinds of decisions, instead opting for what is termed “non-judgmental distribution” of its various types of public welfare.

That writer continued: “For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.” He even instructed believers to not associate with those who did not obey those instructions. Today’s common practice of taking public assistance while “leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies” is an example of civil government’s inability to do the job because of its “distance,” size and impersonal nature.

There is a life-principle that says the standards in which one is raised become our foundational norms throughout our lives. That means here that those who have grown up during the past 80 years, the years of the growth of our nation’s civil welfare system, can be expected to view that system as the normal and necessary way to do social welfare, unless they were fortunate to have been raised with a biblical mindset. Because it has been 80 years, only a few of us remember when church, church-related organizations and family were America’s social welfare system and “kinsman redeemers.” All kinds of personal support were available, including assistance for and monitoring of needed changes in life-style. This strengthened the larger family, community and church relationships, helped prevent waste of resources, and kept family units intact. That occurred in our biblically-orientated nation whose roots came from the God of Moses who then revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ, our ideal Kinsman Redeemer.