THOUGHTS OF NOVEMBER, 2013

1. A younger brother who is very much committed to the Lord and to the Body of Christ blessed me today by telling me of his love and appreciation. It’s good to be encouraged from time to time without having to wait for your funeral service, which the honoree always misses. Really, it makes no difference, does it? Healthy relationships are blessings; they stir our faith in and gratitude to the Lord and encourage us to nurture others while we are traveling through this earthlife.

He said “You let me make mistakes and still love me. You don’t try to make me be what I should be.” He spoke to only a part of the discipleship process, but he was right. We have to bear with one another all through life -- in our marriages, work, etc. Correction and counseling have their proper places, but much of others’ “stuff” we must bear with while truly loving them, staying in fellowship with them, elevating them in their and others’ eyes, and trusting the Lord. If we put our hands on others’ souls too much we will stunt their growth, make them an actor, and mold them into our likeness. The Greek word for actor is hypocrite. God has patience with us, and so should we have patience with others.

Not carving on others’ souls is evidence of faith, love, and godly patience in the presence of their sinnings. In Exodus 20:25 Israel was commanded to not carve on the stones that they used to make an altar to their God. He is the only one who can work [successfully] on the altars of our hearts. He carved the Law on the two stone tablets by His own finger – Ex. 31:18; 32:15-16; 34:1. It can be said that His Old Testament carving job has been made easier now that He has given believers in Jesus Christ soft hearts of flesh – Ezek. 11:19; 36:26.

We have essential jobs in God’s work on others, but putting our hands to their hearts is not part of our calling. Jesus’ Spirit in us calls us to love all, even our enemies. We create fertile ground, plant the seed and water it, but it is the Lord who gives growth and creates change.

My response to that younger brother was, “Better to let you make mistakes than to make a mistake of you.” That was another way of saying that which Jesus said in Luke 22:31-34.

2. Along that line, wise parents know that they have not changed the ways of their children just by silencing them. All levels of leadership know that silencing dissent only silences the opposition, which then goes underground, organizes and rearms until another day, when it comes roaring back stronger and more determined than before.

3. Still along that line, parents are measured by the degree of civilization they have created in their children, meaning the good stuff that has been encouraged to grow in their kids’ souls -- their behavior, their ways of thinking, and that which inspires them. Again, that applies to all types and levels of leadership – family, church, city, etc.

4. Much has been rightly said about bearing our crosses. More must be said, continually, until we depart this earth-life and stand with the Lord in the hereafter. Until then we are granted times, places and incidents to continue with that which pleases Him – our perfection process, called sanctification, which is the process of laying down the old man, [or perhaps having him torn down] in order to be built up.

5. John the Baptist said that his greatest joy was when he heard Jesus’ voice – John 3:29. He meant simply hearing his Messiah’s voice! It was not what Jesus said, but that Jesus talked to him and John heard Him – and that John saw His [the Messiah’s] day. Today that same voice speaks and still causes overwhelming joy when heard.

The content of His message is certainly life-giving, but can you imagine?! “He spoke to me!” That’s the greatest joy. See Hebrews 3:7.

6. I’ll let you, only you, in on a secret arrangement made between the Lord and me. I had seen in Scripture and in my life experience that we saints have a weakness. Yes, it’s sad but true; we have “a” weakness. We want spiritual gifts and power, even at the expense of personal carnality or shallowness. We are so hungry for spiritual reality and real life that we will misbehave [sometimes terribly] in order to receive and display spiritualities. See Matthew 7:21-23.

When I first saw that, in Scripture and lived-out in the church, I quivered in my soul. I cried to the Lord, asking that He never allow me gifts or power beyond the measure of my personal righteousness. Since then, I have not fretted over my lack of spiritual giftedness or power. I focus on personal righteousness and the Lord handles my giftedness and power.

7. The father had the family’s very best robe brought out and put on the prodigal son who had repented and returned to the family – Luke 15:22. This Thought asks, “Have you been robed in the very best of the Father? Do you have on the robe of Christ?”

The prodigal son’s robe made him look better than he was inside, which made him uncomfortable. Because of his bad behavior, he wanted to be just a servant, not a son with his father’s best food, clothing, and family status. As with us, when we put on the Lord Jesus we too are clothed with more than we feel comfortable with, if we know the drama and depth of that which has just happened to us. We can feel like hyperspiritual actors, hypocrites, or maybe thieves, if we don’t know our Father’s plan and His love for us.

Certainly, we have not earned the gift [no gifts are earned; all are freely given]. Yet the Lord tells us to “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” – Rom. 13:14. That’s the Father telling us to put on Christ [by faith] and to stop rejecting the gift of His best [by unbelief or toxic humility].

Putting on Christ is the process in which His character replaces our character. The clearer we see that [in His word], and the more we wear it [in faith], we find that our behavior changes [in deed]. The process is >99% through faith and <1% through applied effort. It’s an exchange of His life and character for ours.

But what if a Christian chooses to go the way of the elder son? If we choose that direction we are still with our Father and all that He has is ours – Luke 15:31. The vast difference is that without wearing Christ’s robe we find ourselves in a deaf, blind and insensitive life – unforgiving, legalistic, work oriented to receive grace, judgmental, ungenerous, and Pharisee-like.

We, all Christians, have received equally from His bounty [John 1:16] but are tempted to believe that we cannot enjoy His grace heaped upon grace unless we have earned it. That’s not the life in the Spirit that is offered us. Better we live like “God’s word is true and effective for me.” Those whom our Father has justified have been given open access to Him and to the riches of Life by faith.

8. Being grounded in the truth enables us yet-mortals to be oriented with eternity, thus be able to speak applicable truth to others. But, if we know but do not live the truth, we join the mass of others who teach and preach and counsel according to the word of truth [hopefully] but lack transformational power in our words. There is some power in simply speaking the truth, but real power comes with our living ourselves the truth that we speak. This power may not be of the flashy sort, but is inward, and gives life.

9. Born again Christian, are you one with your Heavenly Father? Yes! As Jesus was during His earthlife, so are we, meaning that we are part of Him and He will never deny Himself. If you are not gripped by that truth, you might consider going overboard with the Thought for a while. After a few or more years of your magnifying that truth, and His enjoying you as you do it, your Father might correct you for being so wonderfully, faithfully wrong, if indeed you were.

10. Helping a person interpret that which is happening in his life presents a wonderful opportunity for presenting the living Jesus, His gospel, life in the Spirit, and the picture of eternal life. It is a rescue opportunity whether for an unbeliever or Christian. Clarity and re-direction are certainly life-giving.

The ability to interpret life for self and others requires four soul-qualities: 1) Spiritually enriched, naturally occurring, peace producing, mind opening attributes such as common sense, maturity, insightfulness, understanding, patience and compassion, 2) A biblically-informed mind that is marked with boldness and humility, 3) the Holy Spirit’s gift of spiritual discernment, and 4) the ability to hear the Lord whisper secrets about others. The absence of any of those four attributes reduces the anointing and accuracy of our counsel.

Everything of the human soul is not bad. The problem is that when we use one of the above without the other three, or if we are not submitted to the Lord, we and our ministry/counsel are crippled. Let’s look at those four qualities one at a time. 1) Even if optimally present, the natural attributes are only an attractive setting for healthy counsel, which is good in itself but lacks the power of God. 2) The biblically-informed mind is great and necessary but leads to Phariseeism if the counselor’s attributes stop there. 3) Spiritual discernment pries the lid off of and cuts to the quick of fleshly protections and deceptions. 4) A word from the heavenly throne destroys resistance at its root, if the counselee is called and it is his time to respond to the Eternal One.

11. Give people the opportunity to act or not act upon the truth that you present to them. If you have presented the truth, and they refuse to act on it, of if they go contrary to the truth, they will most probably be enlightened by their mistake. If they acted upon the truth they will be blessed and be on the road of Life. That knock on your door may be them; let them into your life.

That’s the “benefit” of sin, meaning being given the opportunity to sin, then sinning, being convicted, repenting, forgiven, and being restored. It worked between Jesus and Peter. Remember that Jesus let Peter sin but prayed for his post-sin results.

11. Spiritually dry and dying persons and congregations have two lists; 1) that which they want and 2) that which they do not want. Usually, the “want” list is more people and money; and the “don’t want” list is certain kinds of people, new leadership, and biblical Christianity.

They then face a problem. They must face the truth, first going through the “don’t want” list before they can begin the “want list.” Remember that the Lord wants and uses those who “are nobodies,” who “have nothing,” and are “going nowhere.” All others want a Savior but not a Lord.

12. How is your adventure in forgiveness coming along since last month – Thought No. 30?

13. As the world continues its spiral downward into death before its complete renewal, here is more to work and pray about. In Belgium, where euthanasia is already legal for people over the age of 18, the government is considering extending it to children. No other country has done this. The same bill would offer the right to die to adults with early dementia. The euthanized person’s organs are harvested for transplantation.

The mentally ill are euthanized in the Netherlands, and in Switzerland and Quebec. Death on demand is the ultimate goal of the euthanasia movement. A thorough knowledge of these things that are going on in the world is helpful, perhaps essential, to dealing with it.

14. While thinking about the world’s spiral downward before the Lord completely renews it [Rev. 21], let’s look at that very process in several lesser areas. The process is called “creative destruction.”

Creative destruction goes on in individuals as we resist the Lord until we hit bottom, as Alcoholics Anonymous terms it. Then we look upward and are willing to yield our godship to the one true God. It can be painful and ugly, and appear nothing other than destructive. But grace comes to bring life after death.

Creative destruction is a proven forestry method. Years of wooded trash, limbs and underbrush are burned regularly in order to improve the forest. Some plants and trees must have fire in order for them to survive as part of the forest. For example, the sequoia’s seeds require fire to break down their coating. They won’t grow without it.

In economics, creative destruction removes or reduces certain businesses and jobs from the workplace. It’s not pleasant to lose your business if you are a blacksmith, but we don’t need many blacksmiths these days. Relocation, downsizing, and possible bankruptcy are painful, but necessary.

Paul had good insight into the process. He knew that the Lord takes us down until we have nothing to offer him but our selves. Our past achievements mean nothing, or worse, because they often present the picture of some of His glory being of us. When we have nothing in which we can glory, He gets all of the glory.

Thank you, Lord, for creative destruction [ouch!].

15. BUT being nobodies, with nothing, and going nowhere certainly challenges our human [sin] nature. We would rather be [and be known as] honest, clean and “normal” Christians as defined by the present condition of the church, and by society, especially our peers. If the Lord Jesus had not found those few good men who were tired of being or trying to be “normal,” and wanted to become His disciples He would have no church. They left all and followed Him – Mark 10:28. If they had been somebodys, with responsibilities, and intent on going somewhere they would have eventually died in place, missing Life.

There is a simple, experiential truth: If the Lord possesses all we have, we will possess all He has. From the time of our becoming born again Christians, until the time of our departures from this earth-life, one of the processes we go through is the decreasing of ourselves so the Lord can increase in us. It is similar to humbling ourselves so the Lord will lift us up – Matt. 232; James 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6. If we are grabbed by that process, we will give up all of self and stuff, not only the bad but the cumbersome that would otherwise burden all who sign on for the race – 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Heb. 12:1-2.

By God’s grace, disciples see that Jesus is Lord of all, even though they do not yet see the fullness of that lived-out in the world. Obviously, to the natural eye, all things are not submitted to Him. Only faith eyes can see actuality in the past, present and future. And only love enables perseverance when efforts are currently visually non-productive.

16. Knowledge and truth not only inform and convict us but are meant to transform us. If we are informed and convicted but not transformed we are in danger of becoming gospel-hardened hypocrites.

If we are transformed, we respond/react according to our transformed nature. If we have not been transformed, yet are convicted by the truth, we may eventually see the error of our first response and indeed decide to obey the truth. The delay/pause in the conviction-to-decision process shows the inferiority of living by convictions compared to living as a transformed person.

The process of being convicted by the truth is meant to move us along into transformation, not leaving us in the position of needing to consider the moral basis for every or many decisions. Having been transformed, we are free to act without hesitation, at least too long, on the morality of matters.

17. Are you consciously aligned with a “greater and higher purpose” than yourself? I know each of you, and that your focus is the Lord, but let’s disallow His being your greater and higher purpose for the few minutes of this Thought. Instead, look about in your life for that project, person, or whatever that is greater than you, that you are dedicated to, and that you work for. Have you adjusted your life for the sake of that purpose? Do you consistently pray for it? When things get worse, do you persist in and even increase your efforts? If so, you have joined yourself to it. You and it have become unbeatable. If the Lord has established that unity, you cannot fail in His purpose. Persist until “the end.”

18. Jesus said we must enter the narrow gate, which then puts us on the narrow way. Your and I decided to enter the gate, and did. That decision is over. It was a one-way gate. There we were, standing within the gate, new creatures with a real future that no one could take from us. Then came the continual, decision-making life process – choosing the way of Jesus for ourselves.

Have you noticed since then that the narrow way has continually lead through broad places? If the narrow way led only through narrow places, we could not wander off of the path. But, then we discovered that the way is narrow even through the broad places, and that all of those broad places are not obviously evil. Many are nicely wrapped and attractive and seem to be, or lead to, that which/whom would fulfill us. My, my. How the flesh complains!

19. Have you considered that Grace is an excellent name for a man? For Grace to be a man’s name he must first be a friend of sinners and appreciative of the humble. He would have to be capable of doing things that no other human could do, and able to calm all fears during the process. He must be able to lead to the narrow gate of salvation those who do not love him, take them through, thereafter keeping them on the path by always being with them. He must be completely trustworthy.

Grace is a man’s name. His other name is Jesus.

20. One thing, a very important one thing, is that we be orderly in our lives so we can be quickly and “recklessly” responsive to the Lord. An erroneous idea is that those who are outlandishly faithful and quickly available to the Lord necessarily lead disorderly lives. That is exactly wrong. It is true that some faithful saints who are quickly responsive to the Lord also have disorderly lives, giving the false impression that being led by the Spirit makes one unfit for life’s higher levels of leadership and responsibility. The Lord is able to do wonderful things with those of His who listen to Him and move quickly. Keeping orderly lives enables us to be faithful and spontaneous.

21. For teaching, judgments and leadership, the earliest church relied upon those who had been with Jesus – the first apostles, of whom eleven remained after Judas’ suicide. But gradually that group began to die off, via martyrdom. Paul was a later-comer to the apostolic and church scene, overlapping the first apostles’ later ministry. He taught that Jesus had not only presented the church with His original apostles but had also given the church additional apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to be teachers, judges and leaders of His word and life – Eph. 4:11.

Then, in about 90 A. D., John, the last remaining of the original apostles, “enlarged” Paul’s expansion of Jesus’ ministry of the word by saying, “But when you do not have access to the first apostles or to the five-fold ministry of Jesus Christ’s word, you are instructed inwardly personally by the Holy Spirit” -- 1 John 2:27. That is a paraphrase of the verse but it seems to be a faithful one.

The purpose of that progressive revelation to the church was and is to first keep the budding church focused on the original leaders who had been with Jesus, then upon Christ-given subsequent leaders, then upon the believers’ personal adequacy in Christ. More properly said, “upon Christ’s adequacy in them personally.”

My Thought here is that when the five-fold ministry is available, we should avail ourselves of it, or we may find that we are left without Christ’s current supply of teaching, judgment and leadership in our lives. We are not dependent upon others for the richness of Christ, except when it is God’s plan that we be.

22. I have seen it for years. A Christian leader speaks out verbally or in print against homosexuality, even while saying that we are to love the homosexuals while hating their sin, and the homosexual lobby response is that “Christians hate homosexuals.” Sometimes that twist, running the two things together into one, may be a deliberate effort designed to put Christians on the defense, but I am coming to see what I think is mainly behind the blindness and deception.

There is a common countrified saying that says, “If you kick my dog you kick me.” That means that the dog owner is so closely aligned with his dog [at least for the occasion] that in the owner’s mind they have become one, like, “If you insult my wife you insult me.” So, when in the homosexual’s mind homosexuality becomes the homosexual, he must necessarily feel condemned as a person, along with his acts of homosexuality. He/she cannot separate the two; cannot perceive love from one who loves them but condemns their behavior.

23. Revelation from God: How do we get it? I’ll skip making a list of answers to that very important question, and go directly to the one answer. If you are “in Christ” you are on the right track because “in Christ Himself is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” – Col. 2:2-3. If you are not in Christ [meaning not born again, not possessing God’s Holy Spirit] get there! Truth and life will open up to you. Then, spend the remainder of your earth-life getting closer to Him. For revelation concerning anything, seek Jesus.

24. Three points on the body of Christ: 1) It is a group of humans who are actually and forever God’s family. He created the group by putting His Spirit in certain ones and bringing them in – Eph. 2:4-10. 2) Cooperation and unity in the family is based on each person having fellowship with our Father and with His son, Jesus – 1 John 1:1-5. If we say we have fellowship with our Father and Jesus but we are out of fellowship with others in the family, our minds are darkened. [That means we have been caught in a lie – 1 John 1:6-7]. 3) The older brothers [and sisters] in our family have been given responsibility for and authority over the youngers. The olders are responsible to our Father. The youngers submit to the olders because our Father says so, but the love and wisdom of our olders help us submit as we should.

25. It appears that those Christians in Matthew 7:21-23 did not understand [or accept] that Holy Spiritual power should not be sought without first accepting the cross-walk. It has been said that the cross is power disguised in weakness. Resist the temptation to bypass Calvary and rush to Pentecost.

26. Thanksgiving Holiday in America is again over. Here are 3 questions for you to mull over. I’d wager that you have already done the first, which is, “What are you thankful for?” The second, “Who is thankful for me, and why?” That one is designed for us to develop more muscles of truth while we repent of our pride. Then the third, “Who is not thankful for me, and why?” requires more than a mulling over. It requires some action – Matt. 5:23-24.

27. More questions. “How is the Lord doing with His plans for your life?” The question is not, “How are you doing with your plans for your life, or with God’s plans for your life.” That requires we know that He has His eternally prepared plan, and that we have been given some knowledge of what it is [other than the generic or being good while accepting the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20]. The question is person-specific. Is it meaningful to you?

“Would you be satisfied if the Lord’s commitment to you matched your commitment to Him? Honestly, of course not. There is no problem admitting to that situation and answering it because it is meant to lead us to the next question of, “What am I going to do about it?” The answer goes back to the first question of this Thought. If you find yourself wandering off or dallying along on the narrow path, ask Him to move you along. He will. He wants you to be able to say that He brought you to life, has been with you for “X” years, has never forsaken you, and never will – that you have failed Him many times and that He has restored you every time, and always will.

28. Nothing we have is ours. It was given us by the Lord, no matter how hard we worked for it in the process or even if it was a gift or family inheritance. We are all only stewards of that that which is “ours.” That includes temporal possessions, spiritual gifts, or whatever else can be imagined as ours. Being stewards means that the Master, our King and Father, will teach and direct us on their use, which will always be appropriate for King’s kids and for the advancement of His kingdom.

29. The first time I heard the Lord speak to me was in 1932 or 1933 during an extended stay in St. Joseph Hospital in Houston, Texas. I was 2 or 3 years old, my appendix had ruptured, peritonitis was rampant, and I lingered near death for a few weeks. That was before antibiotics [I’m sure] and I. V. fluids [I think]. My mom was continually at my side, praying and praying. One day I heard a voice calling me to, “Come.” It was a peaceful, soothing voice. I told Mom, “I have to go now.” She asked me, “Why?” I told her that I heard a voice that was calling me. She said, “You’re not going anywhere!” and began to pray again.

I remembered that voice but did not know who it was, until I began to walk with the Lord when I was age 33. When then I again heard His voice, I knew Him from His brief conversation of 30 years previous.

30. One final Thought for November: Never doubt in the dark that which the Lord told you in the light – Matt. 10:27. Selah.