THOUGHTS OF MARCH, 2014

1. Knowing the truth sets us free. [Being told the truth doesn’t assure freedom, but accepting it does. That’s what Jesus meant by “know.”] That’s a basic truth with guaranteed results. Of course, you recognize it as something Jesus said, but remember that it was established as “fact with inevitable effect” even before Jesus was born onto the earth. We could flip the coin to the other side and say with equal assurance: “if you will believe [also tell or use] lies you will be bound by them.”

It’s tragic the way we accept lies or partial truths and hold to them. In a short time they become part of the matrix of our souls. We are molded by and controlled by them. It becomes a workplace and family thing, and then an ethnic and a national thing. Wars are started and fought because we believed wrongly. Embraced lies, like the truth, endure.

We find additional reasons to tell the truth, such as not having to remember which lie we told to whom, or suffering from the result of being found lying. Franklin P. Jones [1908-1980], American humorist, said: “Always tell the truth. You may make a hole in one when you are alone on the golf course some day.”

There are special times when we really want people to believe us, when the only thing we may have as evidence is our reputation.

2. If a saint is devoted to the Lord Jesus, as opposed to being devoted to the ministry or calling, he will be able to talk or lead according to the depth of his devotion, not just according to his experience. If instead he is devoted to his ministry or calling, he may think he can lead others almost anywhere and even talk like an accomplished master while doing so. The saint who is devoted to Jesus will get a warning in his soul via the Holy Spirit when he talks beyond himself. Of course, the warning can be ignored but conviction will come and will bring grief and godly repentance. Again, of course, if the conviction is ignored, spiritual dullness results, leaving Satan’s victim to have not much more than a lack-luster history and dead tradition.

A situation arises here, that those who are devoted to their ministry or calling can be absolutely convinced that their devotion is to the Lord Himself. There are two resources for not getting too far into that situation, or for exiting from it once entrapped. One is the Lord Himself, alone, by working in the saint’s soul. The other is the Lord’s body, the church. If we are loners we may find ourselves adrift with our blind spots. If we are an active unit of the body, brothers will bail us out [restore us] – Gal. 6:1. The body ministry to one in trouble also shows that we know what Jesus did when He washed the disciples’ feet – John 13:17.

3. “The only thing that ever sat its way to success was a hen.” – Sarah Brown [1975-present], American actress.

4. Misinformation is defined as accidental untruth. Disinformation is the intentional misrepresentation of the truth. Jesus said that we were to take heed that no one deceives us – Matt. 24:4. Whether accidentally or intentionally, the effect on us is the same. Paul warned us that “the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some would depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” – 1 Tim. 4:1. Can you think of such spirits and doctrines that do not have religious faces? It is probable that they will present themselves to us with pleasant demeanor and helpfulness. Deception is very deceptive.

5. Without faith it is impossible to please God – Heb. 11:6. That means a Christian’s good works done outside of applied faith do not please Him. As an example, consider that the Lord gives you a nudge to do or say something. If we do not think we are adequately informed or qualified, we may not do it until we get more information from the Lord. Others may take that nudge and move into action, actively trusting the Lord to be both the initiator and completer of His project.

That is to say that if you want to know all about something before you do it, you will find yourself left to read the books written by those who did it in faith. Frank Scully [1892-1964], American journalist, said, “Why not go out on a limb? Isn’t that where the fruit is?”

6. We all need, and occasionally appreciate [depending on our attitude when being corrected or taught], help distinguishing between two similar words or thoughts from time to time. N. T. supplies these examples; distinctions, not divisions; unity, not uniformity; and hopefulness, not hopelessness. Yes, lots of difference.

7. “Opportunity is sometimes hard to recognize if you are only looking for a lucky break.” -- Monta Crane, writer. Judas missed his one-in-his-lifetime opportunity because he was trying to create a lucky break that would benefit him and his nation. He tried to use Jesus, to force His hand in the direction of driving out the Romans and setting up the kingdom of Israel. The Lord Jesus will indeed set straight Rome, Israel and the remainder of the world but in His time and His way. The quick fix or lucky break is seldom the way to go but it sure is attractive. Opportunities can be recognized by the need for our preparation, attention, commitment, diligence, and persistence.

8. At times the church tries to mimic the world. At times we should – Luke 16:1-13. We watch the world “out there” and see them enjoying themselves more than we are! That’s disappointing. When someone else is having a greater time than we are by methods that we have deemed improper, it’s disappointing. When those same people are more united and cooperative than we are, they and their methods get our attention. When they attract our youth into their sphere and practices, that’s the last straw!! So, we say, why can’t the church do something like that to have fun and attract families and youth? The truth is that the world has many ways to enjoy themselves that the church can employ, but we have proscribed some of them as sin. Don’t copy the world, but don’t get narrow where Scripture and the Holy Spirit are broad.

9. Our sons have grown into fine men. We all went through trials and tribulations while they were growing up as sons and I was growing up as Dad. It is easy to be proud of them, especially when I see how much they have “done it on their own.” It would have been so easy for them to wash their hands of Dad when they grew up, but we have grown closer and closer together as the years progressed.

I’m thankful. Be encouraged if this little Thought fits you.

10. Many of the things we do as church have their roots in Jesus’ life and teachings and, more remotely, in the Old Testament. I want to do a little study here about several of them. It will not be an exhaustive study, but an effort to understand them better, and perhaps to understand others’ understandings better. All three topics are meaningful but only if attached to an active and current faith in the Lord, and with some degree of genuine humility – otherwise, they will simply be nice religious acts that are meaningful only to our personal religious social unit.

1) Foot washing – This is usually promoted and done as a deep display of genuine humility. I thank God that humility is involved, but humility is neither the reason for, the root of, nor the proclamation of the reality of foot washing. When you wash your brother’s feet you are saying that 1) you are God’s willing instrument to remove his sin and bad habits which he has gathered in his walk through the world, 2) you will be God’s willing healer of the injuries he has sustained in his encounters with the world, and 3) you will be God’s instrument of peace and rest for his soul. In the natural the three things you do are cleaning his feet, treating any injuries, and giving him hospitality. Foot washing is meant to develop, sustain and enrich genuine servanthood in the church. Jesus said we would be blessed if we understood and did what He did when He washed His disciples’ feet.

2) The Lord’s Supper – The Eucharist, or Lord’s Table, is meant to be one of the most effective means for the Lord to perfect and maintain quality love in the church. It is usually for Christians only, and is a reminder of the Lord’s loving, sacrificial gift of Himself to you and to each of the other members of God’s family. As His body was torn by sinners, so now is His body [the church] torn by our sin and sin’s resultant separations. Thus, the Lord explained through Paul [2 Corinthians 11:17-34] that when we prepare to partake of Communion we should first examine our souls and behavior. If we are not in love and unity with a brother[s} we are to skip Communion, become unified with that brother, then take Communion. Because taking Communion is a proclamation of our unity with other Christians, we are doing a lie if we do otherwise. The effect is that we fall under God’s judgment, described as becoming weakly and drying up spiritually and possibly physically.

3) Water baptism – From tradition to tradition, water baptism signifies various things, such as; 1) becoming a member of Christ’s worldwide church, 2) becoming a member of the denomination in which you were baptized, 3) becoming a member of the one congregation in which you were baptized, 4) a necessary act for your salvation, 5) an outward show of an already-accomplished act of God, 6) an elective ritual, 7) a scriptural mandate, and 8) probably several others. My opinion [watch out; this is only an opinion!] is that God has no problem with any of the above “uses” of water baptism, if it has its basic component as Paul and the Holy Spirit wrote in Galatians 2:20, which reads: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.”

11. “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” - George Bernard Shaw. Perhaps you should re-read Thought No. 10.

12. It has been suggested by some seriously minded Christians that the church should adopt a motto much like that of the French Foreign Legion, which says: “If I falter, push me on; if I stumble, pick me up; if I retreat, shoot me.” I’ll stay with the kingdom of God, where everyone is committed to love me as themselves.

13. All of us have our individual callings. In my case, if we were called to serve a neighborhood we moved into the neighborhood. If we were called to serve a town we moved to that town. That required a lot of soul changes and household moving, but I think the Lord was helping us relate closely with those whom to whom He had made us servant brothers.

We sweated without air conditioning in some cases, wore clothing longer before washing them because the water was dirtier than our several-day worn underwear, and drove cars that did not attract neighborhood strip-artists. I think the common term is that we servants got “down and dirty” with those whom we were called to serve if they were down and dirty.

Margaret Atwood [1939-present], Canadian writer, leftist and humanist, got this one right when she said: “In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt.” Moms know that at times they need to smell like baby poo and erp if they are going to be good moms, but they return to their romantic mode by cleaning up and smelling good just before their sweetie comes home from work. Women are wonderful creatures.

14. “Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and and hurry off as if nothing had happened.” – Winston Churchill [1874-1965], British Prime Minister and Man of the 20th Century. Yes, we do, Brother W. C. When the Holy Spirit is doing something in us and shows us something of the truth of ourselves, something that needs changing, an attitude of complacency can cause us to “hurry off as if nothing had happened.” When I am satisfied with myself he way I am, even if a few “unimportant” others seem to be dissatisfied with me as I am, getting on with life can become more important to me than listening to the Lord about a “small” change in my soul. The resulting lack of improvement leaves me unprepared for tomorrow, for which the Lord would have prepared me. The many good things of life and ministry can come before the more important sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, preventing His work in me – John 14.

Here is a check often given us by the Holy Spirit so we can judge ourselves, whether we are walking in the Spirit [functioning according to the kingdom of God, living according to the Spirit] or according to our culture, as pleasant as our culture may be. If you have to make a cultural adjustment when you enter another culture, and you do it without strain or fear or unrest, you are probably doing well in your kingdom walk. Notice that this has nothing to do with being a good person of righteous behavior. It has to do with consciously abiding in the kingdom of God no matter in which natural culture we find ourselves. We can make or not make all sorts of adjustments to earth’s natural *cultures without straining or losing our peace, if we walk in the kingdom no matter where we are and with whom we are involved.*

15. Christians have opportunity to address the complex issues of private and public lives. We are the light and salt of the world [not “can be”] – Matt. 5:13-14. If the world is bright, dim or dark that’s because of our condition as its light. There is nothing or no one else who gives light other than the Lord as He is reflected in and by us, although a christianized world around us can reflect Him with measure.

We are the world’s salt, preserving that which is good in order to provide life and flavor to the world. The world tastes better to itself and is healthier in itself due to our salty minority presence. All of that speaks to common and extraordinary creativity, giftedness, love, justice, mercy and intelligence – none of which may have a clearly religious face.

16. It is not always possible to have our own way. Reasons for that common and occasionally difficult dilemma are several. It may have to do with our not having the power or authority to choose our most desirable way, or that we have voluntarily laid aside that power and authority in favor of a greater desire, such as obeying the Lord and serving humanity in certain “called” ways.

As socio-political life becomes more and more socialistic, choices are reduced so that all can avail ourselves of things and services that were unavailable to some. It then becomes unavoidable within the kingdoms of this world that standards and quality are lowered. No earthly society can give everyone the best of anything, but must lower quality and standards in order for all to have a meaningful taste of the pie -- although in the perfect kingdom of God the best for all is possible and will happen. Why? Because we become more producers than consumers.

Here is an excellent description of quality healthcare in the perfect kingdom of God: Appropriate care tailored to my needs and wishes, with my understanding and consent, given in a timely manner by a physician whose allegiance is entirely toward me and my health, in a location of my doctor’s and my choosing, and at a price that is mutually agreed upon.” Apply that standard to everything, if you can. In the millennium that is the way it will be, or better.

17. The more we live like humans instead of animals, the more we exercise our free will with a responsible conscience. The more we narrow that gap, meaning live more like animals than humans, the more we behave “like I was raised, your honor,” or ”I was swept up in the moment, sheriff.” I mean to point out here that justice systems are accepting animal behavior as a norm, thus excusing [at least to some degree] culprits due to “it was my brain/hormones/friends/education/car that made me do it, so I’m not responsible.” For many of us, the most self-responsible time of our eternal lives will be the day we stand perfectly in the light at the judgment seat of Christ. Our current earth-life acceptance of the truth about ourselves can make that day a most joyful one.

18. It takes us humans until about age 10 before all of our human characteristics are higher than any animal’s. Most of that progress is acquired in the first 2 years.

19. We have so much to be thankful for that there is no way we can express in any one day our thanks to each person in our past for their influence on us, even if they were lined-up in front of us so we could go down the line and be specific. So, we have simply developed a life-attitude of thankfulness [right?!]. That developed attitude is a form of payback to those who have given us Life, most of whom would consider it good payment and in full.

That character quality is called gratitude and is one of the basic products and postures of healthy souls in a healthy environment. Gratitude produces indebtedness [a mindful attitude formed until a blessing is adequately repaid, if ever possible], recognition [due expressions of appreciation to a benefactor], thanksgiving [verbal forms of repayment to Life-givers], praise [verbal means of expressing another’s worthiness], and worship [excessive homage, unless to the Lord].

The Lord created gratitude to be so powerful that it is appreciated by all people and religions. It bursts forth from even the most fallen human, although to varying degrees. The Roman philosopher Cicero [106 BC – 43 BC] said: “Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.”