THOUGHTS OF AUGUST, 2012

1. “An expert is a person who has a few new ideas; a beginner is a person with many” -- Albert Einstein. There are never many “new ideas” in THOUGHTS; just ideas that occur to me as I read, watch and listen to that which others have put forth. It has been said that one can learn a lot by reading, see a lot by watching, and hear a lot by listening. Ideas plant and nurture more ideas in an imaginative mind. An imaginative mind is fertile ground for faith, which requires imagination in order to be alive.

For example: You don’t have any difficulty imagining Jesus, or Moses, or Paul when you read about them in the Bible. You don’t have difficulty imagining Jesus walking on the water. And, I trust that you have no difficulty imagining going to be with the Lord when you are freed from your assignment here in this body. Those are examples of imagining eternal truths.

My son, Kim, is an inventor of computer chips. He imagines them, goes to his computer with his specific imagination, and determines if that which is in his imagination will work. All inventive persons have a great imagination. They imagine that which is natural truth.

Then, most kids can imagine flapping their arms and flying through the air. That is “just” an imagination.

 It’s all “imagination,” a part of our mind/soul given to us by our Creator so we can rise above our present emotional, natural or spiritual condition. It’s part of our being like the Lord, the Imaginer and Creator of all. We are to be experts who, according to A. E., should [always] have a few new ideas flowing from active imaginations.

2. Guilt is meant to last only a short time – from the time we sin until we are convicted, have repented and have asked for and received forgiveness [from God and man]. The Master has set up a heavenly system by which we can and should live free of guilt. Of course, the best way to be free of guilt is by not sinning but, failing that, we can quickly come free of unconfessed sin by confessing.

Shame is meant to last only from the time of our conviction until the time we are forgiven. If it hangs on much longer it becomes toxic or cancerous. Don’t forget to release your shame when you receive your forgiveness.

Sometimes we have to confess our sins to someone else in addition to the Lord – 1 John 1:7-10; Jam. 5:16. If so, that does not get us more forgiven but the resultant openness frees us from our tendency to be secretive, hidden and shameful – all of which bind us.

Remembrance of our mistakes [sinnings] should be with us the remainder of our lives. It is a valuable asset, especially when we go to a brother to help him with his own failures. It reminds us of our own frailty and of our own time(s) in bondage, from which we were delivered by the blood of Jesus our Redeemer, perhaps through the help of a brother.

3. In Hebrews 2:17 we are told that the Lord Jesus “had to be made like his brothers (Christians, especially Hebrew Christians -- ed.) in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” Jesus always retained [only] His identity as the second person of the Trinity, but He took on common humanity in all ways.

Notice that He “had to” become common humanity. He was not compelled to, although we can say that His love for us compelled Him. But, no one compelled Him. He did that voluntarily. Unless He had become one of us, and one with us, any covenant His Father made with Him would have been of no effect for us, because God’s covenant with man/us is not with humanity, but with that one Man, Jesus. See Hebrews 7:22; 8:1, 6. It was a covenant between Father and Son, because all other covenants had failed, they being between God and mankind. Jesus took on our role in the covenant with His Father, He kept the Law perfectly, He obeyed every command God gave and did everything God required of His people. And He did it with the right attitude. That made Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant – Heb. 7:22.

Jesus took our place as the sinful condemned, He kept “our” covenant with God, but He did not keep the benefits of the covenant for Himself. He shares them with any who will believe and trust Him. Any thought we may have of having to do any of that for ourselves sends us into a life of misery. Why? Because that work is now reserved for Jesus. It is too heavy to be borne by anyone else. Our righteousnesses are designed for us to “only” be pleasing to our Father because Jesus was/is our driving force in them [that sentence can surely be said in a broader and deeper way.]

By the way; speaking of making covenants that benefit others, not only ourselves: that is common between parents and society [and any of its parts]. Parents make covenant with employers and other social structures, and their children benefit. The same goes for employers who make contracts with other companies. Their employees benefit. That’s part of being in God’s image and likeness.

4. It is important for us to acknowledge the truth – the truth on any level. Most importantly, I’m thinking of the simple, applicable truth of Scripture. No spin, no dodging and weaving, no denial of any type. Even when we hold on to our sin, determined to not change, if we do not deny the truth in our matter the Lord has an opening in which He can reach inside us and make heart changes. Honesty is a valuable commodity in any situation between God and man.

5. The number one reason people say they attend church is for fellowship. Fellowship is a powerful force, for good or for bad. Among Christians, the Lord designs fellowship to get us in step with Him and one another, to get our souls open to Him and to one another, and thus to be His fertile environment for changing our souls – 1 John 1:7-8.

Because a common interest is necessary for any enduring fellowship, we have the perfect setting for the real thing. We have Jesus as our common interest [and much more].

The number two reason people attend church is for healing. That causes a real problem in the church, because much of our healing comes about as we go the way of the cross, together. If, as is common, we want to be healed but do not want any pain, we will flunk out of [healthy] church life. We can find churches where the way of the cross is dismissed as masochistic, wherein there is no pain and no gain. But the way of the cross, smeared heavily with genuine, sacrificial love, can hold the serious Christian long enough to be encouraged by obvious progressive healing of our wounds.

Cause number three is growth, meaning spiritual maturity. Living things grow. Dying is the natural course of sick things, including Christians and church groups. Spiritual maturity [discipleship] was one of the last commands of the Head of the church. It is our normal condition.

The remaining reasons are for you to list. Nancy and I go to a church to help bring life when it is dying, and to enjoy when it is thriving.

6. Question No. 1: What was Jesus’ mission? Here is a partial answer: 1) To do His Father’s will on earth as it is in heaven – Matt. 6:9-13; John 6:38. 2) To do nothing on His own authority, but to speak as His Father taught Him. To remember that His Father was actively with Him because He always did the things that pleased His Father – John 8:28-29. 3) He always had God’s mission in His heart. 4) He sought the poor, and was and preached good news to them. 5) He set captives free. 6) He healed the sick.

Question No. 2: What is the mission of the church?

7. In some nations, faith is being punished in the name of freedom – freedom from the restraints of religion. That’s going on in Europe and America, big time. But, as a ship has no direction without a rudder, freedom has no direction without religion. The truth of Christianity [Jesus and His words] gives freedom its direction. Otherwise we would have been given freedom to be licentious. Freedom must have guidance.

But what about faith without freedom? If freedom is oppressed [against the will of (some of) the people, faith will be purified and multiply. However, if the people willingly surrender their freedom [always to a civil government in exchange for succor they themselves should have provided], virtue will waste away and faith will become worthless to them. What are the freedoms being surrendered to the state? As usual, we are surrendering the choices to make moral, economic, religious and social choices and thus lose our sense of personal responsibility.

If we are holding out for a theocracy before Jesus returns, which may sound good if it is my religion, that will not work, either. A human theocracy destroys human freedom in the name of a god. That cannot last. But, when King Jesus returns and begins His kingdom on earth, there will be human freedom within a world-wide society that functions well, but only as we attend to our alignment with the King. The smoothness and freedom of life in that manifestation of His kingdom will gradually flow together. No rush, since He/we will have 1,000 years to accomplish whatever He wants, in His own ways.

Lastly, you know the form of government that destroys moral norms in the name of liberty – Libertarianism. Libertarianism would be fairly good for a society in which every person was highly righteous and stayed that way. Righteous Libertarians should do well in the millennium, if they can tolerate the shift of everyone and everything to the ways of Christ the King.

8. America is becoming polarized these years. It especially seems that certain of our politicians are trying to develop polarization to their advantage – at the same time that our churches are working to become just another ingredient of the stew in the religious pot.

Here is a thought that should encourage us. Polarization prior to a major work of God is not new. It is the Holy Spirit’s work especially [but not uniquely] in the churches. Social-political polarization is of the Lord. Consider the polarization of Noah and his family in regards to all others on the earth for hundreds of years while the Lord was preparing to flood the earth. Consider Moses and Israel in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in the Promised Land. In all ages the Lord offered Himself to all and then called apart those who would. He made clear His word and will and way, protected His followers, and judged the remainder. That’s history in advance of the rapture and tribulation.

Yes, not all polarization is righteous.

9. There are two views [that’s the most we can stand today] of the stewardship of the Holy Spirit’s outpouring:

The Protestant view of outpourings on Catholics: Those Catholics will try to institutionalize God’s spiritualities by appointing a priest in every diocese to organize Him (the Holy Spirit) and His workings. Things will quickly dry up.

The Catholic view of outpourings on Protestants: Those Protestants are so disorganized and shallow that anything God does will go off in all directions and won’t last long.

Both views have some truth to them, plus a bit of an attitude. There are those brothers in both groups who have lots of love and truth and a good attitude.

10. The Lord is really moving all over the world. The leadership of Honduras recently called that nation to bow to the authority of Jesus. It was a historic and very moving moment. President Lobo and the mayor of San Pedro Sula [from different political parties] got on stage before San Pedro Sula and the whole country and declared their dependence on God, their need for His help, and the need of submission to Him. They were, essentially, preaching. That from eye witnesses.

In Guatemala City, Guatemala there is a nationwide revival underway. Everything is changing. The city is noticeably clean and orderly. “Everyone” has a whistle, which they blow when anyone is seen being bad. At the sound of whistles, people come running to make things right and peaceful. The spiritual atmosphere is hopeful and positive. The people believe there are answers to their problems. Organized crime is still present but it is being destroyed. Crime is down 80%.

Protestants are praying for the Catholic Church, with love and a good attitude. There is openness and cooperation between the churches. There is a hunger for the Lord and His word. That includes city and national leaders. People are going to church in greater numbers.

Whereas in El Salvador the problem of organized crime was not solved by giving criminal leaders a place in leadership in return for dissolving their gangs, etc., in Guatemala the criminals were required to first turn to the Lord, which they are doing.

Guatemala is now about 30 years post-civil war, and has become a Christian nation.

That which the Lord is doing in Corpus Christi, Honduras and Guatemala can be done …… anywhere??

11. The Lord’s love for His creation is revealed all over His creation, including in His printed Word, the Bible. He even wrote a concentrated description of His love, known as 1 Corinthians 13, which is known as the Love Chapter.

How about checking out your working definition of God’s love by reviewing your understanding of the words used in chapter 13? For example, in verse 4 He says He is not jealous, yet in several places in Scripture He says He is jealous. In that verse he says he is long-suffering [very patient], yet He reveals many times in the Old Testament and New Testament that He has an endpoint to his patience, at which time He is severe. He says in verse 8 that His love never fails. It is popular to think that He loves everyone. So what about His hatred for Esau and others, some of whom are going to Hell?

All of these questions and definitions have understandable answers, of course, if we allow the Lord of Scripture to answer and define them. Jealousy wants the best for someone who is yours. We are the Lord’s, so when we chase after someone/something other than Him, He gets righteously jealous. Human jealousy wants the other person, even if it is not the best for the other person.

The Lord is long-suffering, which shows that He has a limit to His tolerance of our wanderings. During our wandering He woos us gently, but if we do not respond He acts severely. His love never fails. That’s why He acts severely and has limits to His patience. He always works to do the eternal best for us, which commonly is not the temporal best for us. Our response to that? Do it, Lord!

12. It seems that our major problems, personally and nationally, could have been prevented if we had attended to our minor problems. And, perhaps the major ones can be corrected by our attention to the minor ones first.

Major problems: murder, homosexuality, thievery, drunkenness, narcotic addiction, divorce, treason, financial indebtedness, etc.

Minor problems: not turning our other cheek, not loving our enemies, swearing, anger, taking another Christian to court, not giving our shirt to the one who stole our coat, little white lies in order to keep the peace, visual adultery, breaking our word [being late], etc.

That which I called minor are those things that we face daily. The major ones, perhaps only occasionally. The point is that if we attended to the “little” things of everyday life, we would be unlikely to graduate to the “big” things. Slopping through our daily lives opens us and society to the big problems.

To go along with that, if we are unsettled and unsuccessful in the little things, we have created a sandy foundation for our morality. When the big, bad ones raise their heads, we likely will be unsuccessful in avoiding them if we still stand on sand. If we are successful in little things, we will be successful in the large things, and vs.

13. The “fathering spirit/ministry/attitude” is never not needed [that means “is always needed” to those of you without a proper East Texas schoolhouse upbringing]. Like the “brotherly spirit,” it is quietly and deeply appreciated. While the brotherly spirit can be spoken of openly as such, the fatherly spirit must be subtle and unlabeled. Both are equally needed, but the flesh rejects being fathered without well-established consent.

14. Have you noticed that Jesus enjoyed days after days with the open-hearted sinners, but not with the cold-hearted righteous? That ruined His reputation – among the cold-hearted righteous.

How are you doing with those two groups? Can you identify them among your associates?

15. Some borrowed thoughts from a recently attended 3-day medical meeting on geriatrics and long-term care:

 a) How old would you be if you did not know how old you are? That may be answered best in two parts, the physical and the mental, or the body and the soul. Sometimes our bodies get older than our souls, and sometimes vs. Yet, it is a good question. Enjoy answering it to your own self.

 b) Aging is mind over matter; if you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter. However, aging is a matter of fact, to whatever extent it occurs and whatever the reason. It should not matter to us about this baggage we carry about, called a body. It helps a bit for us to take care of it by exercises and diets, so we should – considering all other things during life’s process.

16. The patriarchs died, saying: “I go to be with my fathers.” They knew they had everlasting life. Jesus told the story of the beggar who died and went to be with Abraham, where they and the others who died in faith awaited their redemption via the cross. Unending life is simply logical, being known before there were Scriptures to inform us of its reality. Nothing can take away everlasting life – that’s just the way God made us and set things up.

Eternal life is a different matter. Jesus defined eternal life as a quality, not a quantity. Everlasting life is a quantity. He said eternal life is an intimate relationship with God in which His life is produced in us – John 17:3. I think the accent is on the lived-out production [life of trust and obedience] of God’s life, not on the gifted [by being only born again] side. That is not to question our forever salvation once we are born again but, although we get that without question, God’s project for His children involves our getting with the program during this earth life so it does not need to be done after the time of our return with Him during the millennium.

17. More from the medical meeting on geriatrics:

I was struck with the similarity and parallelism between our natural lives and spiritual lives, especially in the geriatric sense. Old folks tend to get depressed, develop disabilities and illnesses, think that their best years are behind them, evaluate themselves as being of less value, are not satisfied because of life’s emptiness and boredom, and begin to think of death as a means of getting out of their miserable existence.

In the spiritual world, which I hope we all know we live in full-time, the same sort of slide into blah-hood can happen. Our new birth and its pleasures and challenges of growing up can fade. Those spiritualities we enjoyed when we first burst into the kingdom can become ho-hum instead of tools for real life. We may have encountered times of strong opposition or personal failure, from which we have not recovered. We may find ourselves on the back shelf, spiritually bored. We can slide toward spiritual death and look forward to going to be with the Lord [or counting the days until the rapture], instead of looking forward to another day here on earth.

I know of no study done on spiritual decline of older saints, but there are those of the younger generation who could do with some encouragement for pressing on in the Spirit in their remaining years. Several years ago, two young men in their 20s searched me out just to see if there were any older saints who were still pressing on in the Spirit. They were in the process of deciding whether to settle-in as “good, solid Christians” or whether to actually live the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I’ll let you guess what they decided.

18. Still on the similarities between physical and spiritual decline with advanced age:

What is there to do when depression occurs in older saints? Start with a thorough examination and history. Souls need that as well as do bodies. Contributing factors are important, such as relationships, unforgiveness, self-condemnation, unconfessed sin, etc. Those cancers lead to contemplations of spiritual suicide [withdrawal from Christian fellowship, denial of Jesus, etc.] which may be already in progress. The treatment: counseling, fellowship, love, special support group, and “psychotherapy” [biblically remolding a person’s beliefs and attitudes].

The patient may require hospitalization and intensive care, meaning “take him home with you.” Put him in the healing involvement of your home life. They may not suvive without your utmost.

You know that a weak person gets weaker if he stays in bed, so spiritual activity must be encouraged. That means Bible sharing time together, prayer together and spiritual involvements together.

You also know that pressure ulcers develop from too much time in bed and not enough activity. Pressure ulcers on souls are caused by those continual stresses, self-inflicted or otherwise, when we refuse to change position or attitude on something that the Lord wants changed. He will not give up; we must help the patient roll over, eat better food, drink more liquids, get up and go. Sedentary Christians are headed for trouble.

Last of all: If not healed, all diseases eventually run into one, which we call old age. Spiritual old age in a Christian is unnecessary.

19. 1 John 3:9 can be a puzzler. It was to me. I may not have its total understanding, but this helps: When one of my sons did something he should not have done [especially out- of-line for our family standards] I would occasionally say something like, “An Eckert does not do that sort of thing.” That was to help him get a better perspective on his behavior and how he should relate to his heritage.

Thus, I understand John to be saying: “A son of God does not sin.” He is not saying that a Christian cannot sin, which would be contrary to what he said in 1:8-10.

20. We humans are not likely to change things when we are content with them the way they are. That includes our home’s thermostat, our car’s tires, our friends, and our spiritual life. It has been said that the Lord does not send revival unless we are dissatisfied with our souls and churches as they now are. In our discontent, we can create our own revival and get human results, and even be satisfied. In fact, we may definitely not want or allow a Holy Spirit revival.

So, discontent can be a godly and timely thing. Are you unhappy with something? What are you doing about it? What does the Lord want to do about it? Why do something else if He doesn’t want it?

21. Do you have any difficulty speaking the truth to someone when you suspect or know that your relationship will be strained or broken? Preachers have to face that situation. They are tempted to preach and teach only those things that allow them to get along with others. Excuses are, 1) I need to be nice because it’s unrighteous to not be nice, 2) I’m called to unite, not divide, 3) I’m not perfect myself so how can I be specific 4) Etc. All of those excuses leave life in the status quo.

And, you can’t preach it if you don’t believe it.

However, Jesus spoke the truth even though it drove away some of His disciples and most of the religious leaders. So did Paul, Moses, Isaiah, and others. Judas heard all of that truth for 3 years and didn’t do well with it. We will never know the results of our truth-speaking if we do not speak it.

There is a dearth of truth, but where it is spoken [and lived] lives are changed and God is pleased.

22. We hear of burnout. It happens on all sorts of jobs, including those in the church. This is not simple exhaustion physically; it is a mental/emotional/soul exhaustion. Exhaustion is defined as “complete expenditure.” I am wondering how a spiritual person can get nearly or completely expended spiritually on a spiritual job, or anywhere else. Jesus said His yoke is easy and His burden light, and that if we took it upon ourselves [and we learned something He called gentleness and humility] our souls would remain at rest.

His word, His Spirit, and lastly my personal experience convince me that burnout is caused by our working in the flesh. Spiritual labor produces spiritual results, which energize the worker, even if physical exhaustion may ensue. Remember Ezekiel 44:18.

23. This is another reminder that there are two separate receptions of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life – the reception of the Spirit within us when we are born again [making us sons of God] and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon us for service [the baptism/anointing of the Holy Spirit].

Question: When did Jesus become the receiver/possessor of the Holy Spirit? Answer: When the Holy Spirit impregnated Mary’s egg 9 months before Jesus was born.

Question: When do Christians become possessors of the Holy Spirit? Answer: When they are born again through faith in Jesus, which is an act of God’s grace.

Question: When did Jesus receive the anointing/baptism of the Holy Spirit? Answer: Soon after He came up out of the water of His water baptism – Matt. 3:16; Is. 42:1.

Question: When may a person receive the anointing/baptism of the Holy Spirit? Answer: Whenever the Lord wants to do it: a) The Holy Spirit came upon believers in the Old Testament, and of course they were not born again. Being born again was part of God’s plan for those who believe in Jesus after His death and resurrection. b) The Holy Spirit came upon believers in Jesus, at least some of whom already had received the Holy Spirit within – John 20:22; Acts 1:4-8. c) Rank unbelievers were born again and baptized in the Holy Spirit almost or actually as simultaneous actions of God – Acts 10:44-48.

When the word “filled” is used, it is obviously a measure of an amount. Filled means being made full as a first time act of God [Acts 2:4] or as a refilling – Acts 4:31. Believers who had already been filled were again filled, which means they had been running low spiritually, probably because of unbelief. That appears to be the case in Acts 4:31.

24. It has been common in our lives that others lived with us, as real family. Some lived with us for years and have continued to be parts of our lives. They were full family, not “sort of.” We were encouraged to find what Jesus said in Matthew 12:46-50. In fact, it was very encouraging. Some of our natural family [parents and siblings] had the same problems with our lifestyle as did Mary and Jesus’ siblings.

Real leaders lead.

25. God’s people of the Old Testament [the Jews] and His people of the New Testament [Christians] had/have the same problems. One of them is our tendency to add traditions/doctrines/precepts to Scripture. That would be o.k. [?], but they soon become equal to Scripture, which is not o.k. – Matt. 15:9. “Equal to Scripture” means that belief in those extra-biblical doctrines is required for fellowship in the group, or for leadership and ministry, or even thought to be essential for “salvation.”

Isaiah [29:13] saw it. Do we see it?

26. Do you ever have any difficulty letting go of what you don’t need and who you are not? As in Job’s case, the Lord may use some very greasy tools to bring us to the place of being small, naked and poor. If you have gone through that process, perhaps more than once, you know the result – the health you have, the possessions you have, and the reputation you have is enough for you.

At that place we have nothing to prove to anybody and nothing to protect. It’s called “freedom.” From there the Lord can re-stock us. Subsequently, we find ourselves being much better stewards of His stuff.

27. Genesis has many proclamations of the gospel, starting in 3:15 when the Lord spoke to the serpent. Perhaps the clearest support for that statement about “many proclamations of the gospel in Genesis” is found in Galatians 3:8, which reads: “The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations will be blessed in you.’” That’s in Genesis 12:3.

Not one word of God can fail being fulfilled.

28. The world’s physically most healthy nations are: Singapore – 1, Italy – 2, Australia – 3, Switzerland – 4, Japan – 5, Israel – 6, Spain – 7, Netherlands – 8, Germany – 9, Canada – 14, Britain – 21, USA – 33. That means the healthiest nations [smog, foods, etc.], not the health of its citizens.

That’s interesting information. Now I would like to see the results of a study of the world’s spiritually most healthy nations.

29. It has been said that the devil of resentment is in its justification. In each of our Bible study meetings we spend time applying the lesson to our selves – looking into the mirror of God’s word, no spin, no alibis, no blaming others, straight to the cross as the lesson applies. Sweet, peaceful Life ensues.

30. What is “frustration?” It is a lack of agreement with the Lord on His actions or their timing. Our frustrations may be through ignorance or sinful self-centeredness. In any case, if our frustrations are not instructive, they will be destructive. King Ahab was subject to the destructive aspect of his frustrations, but he had the [bad] fortune to be married to the woman of his dreams. She knew how to bring him out of the misery of his frustrations – 1 Kings 21. For her it was frustration vs. satisfaction at any cost.

31. Here is a question that I hope you can answer, although there is not necessarily a right or wrong answer in my brief list of answers.

The question: Which one of the following three choices is your answer to the question of ultimate authority on religious matters? 1) The church’s teaching. 2) The Book of Common Prayer [by any denomination’s name]. 3) The Bible. 4) My elder/pastor/teacher.

32. A test was carried out to determine the effectiveness of hope. Rats were placed into cylinders of water. After they had tread water for a short time, half of them were momentarily rescued by being lifted out of the cylinder, then put back in. The other half were not momentarily rescued. The rats that were not briefly rescued lasted but a few hours. The group that had been briefly rescued swam for over 3 days. Selah

33. Pay close attention to the small things [and small people] because they are the building blocks of large things [and small people become big people]. Foundational character is built first on those little things. We cannot hop from a large battle and victory to the next large battle and victory unless we have intermediate small battles and victories.

34. And a similar Thought: It is risky to live a life in which you must get ready for issues/attacks when they are already upon you. That often results in an inadequate response and poor result, and reveals a wobbly, non-abiding walk. Victory begins with being prepared before the battle begins. Walking in victory means that we have learned that the Lord God is absolutely al-mighty, and that we have placed our lives in His hands, no matter what the cost. Life does not need to be a succession of catch-ups, filled with prayers designed to awaken the Lord and get Him to help us.

35. Here is a little test. Why did Pharaoh chase after Moses and the Israelites? There are several partially true but inadequate answers, such as, “God hardened his heart.” The answer next month. You will be amazed.

If you get this, we are not home yet.