THOUGHTS OF JULY, 2011

1. Everyone has one or more civil governments, for which I am thankful. Civil governments are ordained by God to keep order, by physical force if necessary. However, the church has an entirely different type of government. It has spiritual structure, spiritual authority, spiritual power and the sword of the Spirit’s word, but is not ordained with civil government’s earthly-type of power. That’s why creation needed another governmental structure to bring the earthly sword against evil doers, which is not a function of the church. See Romans 13.

There is a definite similarity between those two governments. They tend to gather power to themselves at the expense of the governed. Why? Because civil and church governments are led and populated by humans. Civil governments are only human; church governments are human plus Holy Spirituals. [I know that that last sentence is variable in both applications.]

Those two governments have another characteristic in common, but civil government again trumps the church. Notice this:

The Pythagorean Theorem has 24 words.

The Lord’s Prayer has 66 words.

Archimedes’ Principle has 67 words.

The Ten Commandments have 179 words.

Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address has 286 words.

The Declaration of Independence has 1,300 words.

The United States Constitution with its 27 amendments has 7,818 words.

The United States government regulation on the sale of cabbage has 26,911 words.

2. Read and rejoice in these few verses, in Amplified and Modern Language versions: Ephesians 1:3-5 and Romans 8:30. That which the Lord has done cannot be undone.

3. Because you already know that you have the ministry of Jesus, let’s put John 17:19 into the personal: “And for others’ sakes [the sakes of all to whom You expose me], Father, I sanctify myself [now set aside myself for Your holy purposes only], that they [others, in return] may be sanctified in truth [set aside in Your reality].” That’s living in consideration of the impact of our lives on others’, as did Jesus.

4. As said many times, “Without God we can do nothing.” Jesus said the same thing about Himself. What about all the evil done, while our evil hearts and minds think we are obeying God, as thought Saul in Acts 9? That’s “something,” but on the heavenly books beside our names it is “nothing.”

So, what about all those good Christian works, including prophesying in Jesus’ name, casting out demons in Jesus name, and performing miracles in Jesus name? Are they not of God? Yes, of course, but not all. Those Christians mentioned in Matthew 7:21-23 who did those things were told that they had not been intimately united with Him, so that they had been ministering in the realm of their spiritual gifts and with God’s power but were not ministering under His direction. Those workers were lawless; their works were disorderly. Those works had benefitted others, but they were “nothing” on the books in heaven. Paul had addressed this in 1 Corinthians 13:3 when he said that those sacrificial works he mentioned “profit me nothing.” The believers in Matthew 7 wanted those works to benefit themselves, which is what our Father also wants, but only when they are God-led works performed in love.

5. Some thoughts about your prayers [let’s make this about you and God]:

1) God is your Father. He loves you unconditionally. His love for you is infinite. He wants to answer your prayers.

2) When it seems that your heavenly Father is ignoring you, He is getting your attention, or your closer attention.

3) Although He already knows your needs and desires, your prayers are necessary. Often, He wants you to know that He is the only one who can help you. Delays and non-answers do that.

4) He wants to convince you that it has been dumb to not have stayed in closer touch.

5) Prayer helps you refine and affirm what you want out of life. It’s part of your maturation process. If you got everything automatically or easily, you would grow up spoiled and irresponsible. Life would be too easy; you would not grow. You would never define for yourself what you want in life.

6) Remember that to utter or to think or to be a living prayer [meaning to continually abide], you need to know that He is willing and able to do everything. Otherwise your concept of God is too small and you are not addressing the All-mighty Father who is in heaven.

6. Why do we have problems [let’s make this one about us and God]? Since God loves us, why do we have problems? He has all the knowledge and connections and power to make life problem-free for us, doesn’t He? Answer: Have you noticed that freedom is God’s way? No matter how much of “All-Mighty” God is, there is no way He could provide for us by pre-empting our problems and substituting blessing in their places. His genuine and confident love for us allows us to branch out on our own – being independent, choosing to do our own thing or His thing. His thing is best, but the course and choices of our lives may need to take us first on tangents.

Life would be neat and tidy if we were robots, but it would be without significance or meaning. That means that He has some higher design for us as “children of God” that robots could not fulfill. To accomplish that higher designed, eternally meaningful purpose, we were given free will to make our own choices, although He hovers about us, removing certain of the impact of our and others’ wrong choices. We suffer certain consequences, but our freedom is intact. We can “move away” from Him, and He will let us do that, not because our moves are good, but because He has decided and arranged things so that freedom is better than force. His love and wisdom and methods are absolutely flawless.

7. An atheist’s perfect prayer: “God, I don’t believe in you. I don’t believe you exist, but I have a bit of reservation because of my minority opinion. So, if I’m making a mistake, I want you to know that I have no quarrel with you. It’s just that I don’t know if you exist. But, just in case you are really there and I’m making a big mistake, give me an introduction.” If you know any atheists, you can teach it to them. If they are sincere, their prayer will be answered – Ps. 145:18.

8. Some things about faith and prayer:

1) God does only good things. When things happen that we call “bad,” that’s a signal that we need to discern God’s goodness in that “bad” event. That’s often a big step for us to take, but otherwise we will remain with only our human insightfulness, unclear about God and His ways. He does things to break the current flow of our life, in order to sharpen our focus. It’s good to know and see God more clearly.

2) When was the last time you were surprised when your prayer was not answered? I’m talking about on the level of the answers to Jesus’ prayers. Shouldn’t faith be surprised when we don’t get that for which we asked? Non-answers to prayer are attention-getting – blessings in disguise.

3) Faith is confident; is always willing to be corrected; does not mind being challenged. Since faith is secure, it is willing to be reviewed although it may lack other types of substantiating facts [meaning it is often un-reasonable and un-factual]. Our Father is always stretching us. He is often after something deeply embedded in our souls that needs improving. But, soul changing is His business; He is the only one who can do it. Today’s changes may be in the area of one of our strongest points, or in an area we consider our strongest points, not in one of our more obvious weak points. But, because He is a good coach, He directs our life’s schedule and He knows what needs to be improved this week before next Saturday’s big game. He does not want to be Clark Kent all week long, then fly in to become Superman the Deliverer on Saturday. At best, that’s for babies. Lives like that are filled with ups and downs. Living by faith and keeping our peace requires spiritual labor.

4) We should get a clear picture of what we are praying about, evaluate it for righteousness, seek the approving witness of the Holy Spirit, and then pray. To borrow some good words from Paul: “Do not lay hands on anyone too hastily,” so we also should not pray too quickly for any good-sounding reason.” Before we pray, make sure it is a spiritually good request.

5) This No. 5 has the potential for revolutionizing the church: Prayer is not an escape from responsibility. Through faith we see how we should pray; through love we put ourselves and our possessions into being at least part of the answer to our prayers. Like Jesus’ prayers, our prayers are designed in heaven to bring us into abiding in eternal reality here and now. It would be good for us to ask ourselves before we pray, “Am I prepared to sacrifice for this? Is it worth the price for me to put myself into this very responsible position?” Prayer is not a magic button for us to push so we can escape. Our prayer’s results may start with us, or may not start at all.

9. There are 39 books in the Old Testament, whereas through at least the third century there were only 22. Flavius Josephus wrote that the Jews had collected 22 books which were “justly believed to be divine” and were “records of all the past times.” What happened? Simply put, many that we now consider one book were previously combined. Here is how they were: Ruth was attached to Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel were considered one book, as were 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles. Ezra and Nehemiah were combined, Lamentations was a part of Jeremiah, the twelve Minor Prophets were considered as one book. Thus, 22 became 39.

10. There are painful actions in life that are called “kicking against the pricks.” The imagery is that of someone kicking against the points of nails driven through a board – kicking barefooted against sharp nail points. Or, kicking barefooted against a cactus. Saul/Paul was in torment as he kicked against the pricks while being successful in his ministry of persecuting Christians. There was an evil fire burning in his soul that was consuming him, although it may not have shown to the casual observer.

The world is full of people who are kicking against pricks. In fact, I will say that all of us do it from time to time. The action may be only and entirely within us, but kicking against the pricks it is. My Thought is that kicking against the pricks, as painful as it is, does not by itself bring us to right mindedness. It would for an animal, but not for humans. For us it takes revelation, preferably of Jesus Christ. Yes, we can stop kicking without revelation, but we are still kicking inside, wishing we had kicked harder and longer.

There is a time to give up, but no one in his right mind should give up anything unless something better was offered. He is better and He has been offered.

11, Paul wrote Timothy [2 Tim. 3:1] that the end of things would be marked with “perilous” times. I understand that a good interpretation of “perilous” is “raging insanity.” If we think that things are heating up for humanity, we should get a parallel view of how things are going for the devil. He is kicking against the pricks. Life is narrowing down on him. He has no higher authority to turn to; no mightier person to give him succor. He has a problem and is being squeezed into a corner. He is lashing out in desperation, knowing that he is in great trouble, intent upon taking all he can down with him.

If you want a human, real life, lived out to the fullest picture of this, consider the last years and months and days and minutes of Hitler’s life. He intentionally destroyed Germany although gradually he knew he had lost the war. He forced the Germans to fight without any chance of surviving, much less of victory. Hitler was one of the humans in whom the spirit of the antichrist took residence, as he has done even before 2 Thessalonians 2 was written.

12. We and the Holy Spirit in Scripture have divided our mentation into six functions: intellect, feelings, emotions, memory, affections and imaginations. If there are more, please let me know.

13. These Thoughts have a bit of truth in them, otherwise they wouldn’t be funny:

1) A man will pay $2.00 for a $1.00 item he needs. A woman will pay $1.00 for a $2.oo item that she doesn’t need but it’s on sale.

2) A woman has the last word in any argument. Anything the man says after that is a new argument.

3) A woman worries about the future until she gets a husband. A man never worries about the future until he gets a wife.

4) A woman marries a man expecting he will change, but he doesn’t. A man marries a woman expecting she won’t change, but she does.

5) A woman will dress up to go shopping, water the plants, empty the trash, answer the phone, read a book, and get the mail. A man will dress up for weddings and funerals.

6) Men wake up as good looking as they went to bed. Women somehow deteriorate during the night.

14. God chose Israel [Deut. 4:37; 7:7] because He looked at them and saw five things: 1) He loved them, 2) They were going nowhere, 3) They were nothing and nobodies, 4) They had nothing to offer Him, and 5) He had to keep His promise. That list strengthens my sense of security.

America Chose God [with “a firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence.”] because they looked at Him and saw five things: 1) They loved Him, 2) They were going nowhere, 3) They were small and incapable compared to the English, 4) He had everything they needed, and 5) They knew He would keep His promises. That list strengthened their sense of security.

15. Jefferson Davis, the only president of the [Southern] Confederate States of America, was imprisoned from 1865 – 1867 after the South lost the Civil War in 1865. In 1866 he was indicted for treason against the United States of America. The case, however, was dropped, and he was denied a trial. He demanded a trial, wanting to argue the constitutionality of the South’s actions in 1860 – 1861, those months during which the southern states seceded one by one from the Union. In 1867, Salmon P. Chase, Chief Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court [a Union court, by the way] wrote: “If you bring these leaders to trial, it will condemn the North, for by the Constitution, secession is not a rebellion. His [Jefferson Davis’] capture was a mistake. His trial will be a greater one [mistake]. We cannot convict him of treason.” What a mess brothers and nations can get into! It started with Cain and Abel.

16. I like to be comforted. I like to be with those who bring me comfort. The main thing they do is be and bring me the truth, not just some sweet words or behavior toward me. The Holy Spirit is our Comforter. It is good to be “with” Him. As the Comforter, the main way He works to comfort me is to be and speak the truth to me. I know He will be gentle but not sugary, truthful but not overbearing. He seldom works by simply giving me comfort in my soul. Instead, He accomplishes that comfort by guiding my thinking into foundational truth in the area of my discomfort. John [16:13] recalled that Jesus had said that very thing, and wrote it down for our comfort – all by the Holy Spirit.

17. Christians are becoming more brotherly and are extending themselves in biblical ways toward prisoners in maximum security prisons. Faith without works [appropriate actions] is dead, prayer without works [personal application post-prayer] is empty, and ministering to prison inmates [especially the lifers] without making mature disciples and ministers of them comes short of the Great Commission. Thus, some prisoners are now receiving pastoral seminary training behind bars. Any inmate who meets the academic standards to enter college, who is given clearance by the state, receives a scholarship for the program. No state funding is involved, except for the classroom space.

Since its beginning in Louisiana in a 5,000 inmate maximum security prison in 1995, the program is credited with a 70% reduction in inmate violence, such as murders dropping from 20-30 per year to none in the past 3 years, and assaults dropping from 400-500 per year to only 40 last year. In addition, graduates of the program are sent out in pairs to other prisons throughout the state.

Every student must be involved in ministry in the prison. In Texas, only 40 students are selected in the nation’s largest and toughest maximum security prison each year, so the program will have 160 total students. Reserve students are on hand if for any reason someone drops out. There are 125 credit-hours to be completed over four years. Students live among the general population, not in special dorms. Graduates receive the Bachelor of Science degree in biblical studies.

It has been pointed out that the prison program has begun to influence the out-of-prison home-base seminary in Houston. Strong doctrine and biblical inerrancy, which have a tendency to become dry and spiritless, are being stirred. At this point, near Houston, 600 inmates have applied for the seminary program, 155 of them were cleared by the State, and 40 were admitted – plus 20 alternates approved. And hear this: none of the applicants need be a Christian in order to enter the program. [Not at all a challenge to the Holy Spirit!] The longer a prisoner has yet to serve, the higher his placement on the admission list. Thus, lifers are at the top if they otherwise qualify. As you can see, the purpose is to spiritually revolutionize life in that inner-world called “prison.”

The church in prison is real, has power, is growing and is reaching out. Those brothers are fulfilling the Great Commission through the Spirit-empowered gospel. God is transforming murderers into the image of Christ. Light is pushing back the darkness.

How are things going with you out there?

18. Likewise, the Lord is moving in other groups to establish deep connections between formerly distant, not-needing-one-another groups. The Acton Institute, a Roman Catholic-based but non-sectarian think tank, has branched out to engage what they call “one of the fastest-growing groups in American religious life: Protestant evangelicals.” Acton Institute promotes economic entrepreneurship; freedom, dignity and equality in society; a comprehensive view of discipleship and work; and, basically, responsible free enterprise. I have appreciated them for years. They do not accept the hand-wringing position of “things are in such a mess, but there is nothing we can do!” Check them out.

19. Most of us know that we are clean before our Father only because we have had His Son’s righteousness imparted to us. But then we are told to keep our robes clean by taking them to the Holy Cleaner – 1 John 1:5-10. Let me say a couple of things about that.

First, remember that we have on two garments. One is the spotless garment of Christ and His righteousness, the garment of salvation, which gets us into the presence of God our Father and into the hereafter with Him forever. That garment cannot be soiled – Is. 61:10; Eph. 57.

The other garment is our white linen garment, the one made of our own righteousnesses, our fruitfulness, our righteous works. It speaks of our sanctification – 2 Cor. 7:1; 11:2; Rev. 19:7-8. That’s the one that must be re-cleaned as necessary, so it will be spotless when we appear before the Lord Jesus for judgment. That means that when we leave this earth-life we can and should be “fessed up.” If so, our robes will be spotless at the judgment seat of Christ.

20. When we understand Thought No. 19 we can understand the parable of the 10 virgins – Matt. 25:1-13. They were all born again Bible believers, preparing themselves for life after this life on earth. They all had on Christ’s spotless garment of His righteousness, the garment of salvation. Yet, 5 of them were foolish, meaning they were “double minded.” They wanted to live 2 lives – one of the kingdom of God and the other of the kingdom of this world. Self was ruling in their souls – 1 Thess. 5:19; James 1:8. A double-minded believer cannot be sanctified. He cannot live Christ’s life. He is not overcoming the world, the flesh, or the devil, but is overtaken and unable to produce enduring fruit [Christ’s character and faithful perseverance], thus he cannot enter into the wedding ceremony – Rev. 19:7-8. He has suffered “burn-out.”

Summary: 1) To whom was Jesus talking? To His disciples. 2) What was His topic? Signs of His second coming. 3) Who was He talking about? The church. 4) What had gone wrong in the church? He had no intimacy with the 5 foolish virgins. He could not reproduce His life/righteousness/fruit in them. 5) What did they lose? They were locked out of the wedding feast [at least]. 6) Where will that feast be? In the millennial kingdom of Christ on earth.

What is our lesson? Works and being saved do not prepare us for His return. We will be judged by the preparedness of our souls; our sanctification. It is a spiritual preparation, and the preparation of one person cannot be credited to another. That oil comes from the closeness of our walk with Jesus on the way to our own crosses. That oil must be purchased. It does not come from us. It is costly.

Keep your lamps burning, Saints – Luke 12:35.

21. This comes under the heading of, “Where there’s a will there is a way.” Before World War II, there was a 5-story synagogue in Vilnius, Lithuania. It was built according to a local rule that said no synagogue could be higher than the churches. All of the churches were much shorter than 5 stories, so the Jews dug deep. Their result was a 5-story synagogue, mostly underground.

22. You will remember that I wrote about Christchurch, New Zealand within the past year. Abbreviating that Thought: A powerful earthquake hit Christchurch. Although no lives were lost, there was considerable damage to the town. An evangelical group asked the city for permission to have a praise and thanksgiving meeting on the city square, which is in front of the cathedral. Those of the cathedral denied permission for the meeting. Shortly thereafter, there was another severe earthquake, destroying many buildings and taking well over 100 lives. The city is a scene of devastation. The city square was then used as a triage station for the wounded and dying.

The latest news along that line is that Christchurch has continued having earthquakes – averaging 20 per day. That’s a total of 7,500 since the first one. One report is that the psyche of the people of Christchurch is being rattled. Thousands of houses are unsafe. Many citizens have simply left town. No one knows if the worst is over. From the information I have, it would be helpful if the church in Christchurch would hold a meeting in the square, repent of its sins and praise the Lord who is Master of heaven and earth.

The Lord is not turning the world upside down, but right side up, and He is shaking and sifting it.

23. The town clerk of Barker, New York has resigned her job. She refuses to violate her conscience by issuing same-sex marriage licenses. She would not issue marriage licenses to homosexual couples. She reports a tremendous amount of support.

24. The clearest fact of all history is Jesus Christ’s first coming to earth about 2,000 years ago. The religious leaders of His time, who knew all of the Scriptures, failed to distinguish between His first and His second coming – the many and exacting pertinent prophecies, that is. So, they rejected Him.

In a bit of defense of those Bible-educated, Holy Spirit ignorant, hard-hearted religious leaders whose minds were closed by God, I will say that even those prophets who heard and saw their own prophecies did not understand what they wrote, or understood only in part –1 Peter 1:10-12. At least they did pray and search the scriptures as they then had them.

25. As stated above, when Jesus came the Jewish leaders grouped His first and second comings into one coming, but the cross and the crown do not mix. The disciples did the same, even until His last minute on earth with them – Acts 1:6. I think we of His first coming, the church, do the same. We reject the cross and try to wear our heavenly crowns early, contrary to His schedule for our coronation. That is to say that godly faith is to be worn humbly, not with premature glorification. There will be a time when we and our faith will be exalted in relation to the world, but now is not that time. This is the time for His and our cross walk.

26. Continuing: Between the fall of man [in Adam], and the coming of the second Adam [Jesus], was the altar, which pointed 1) backward toward that fall and simultaneously 2) forward to the cross. Between His two comings, we have His table [the Eucharist, Lord’s supper] which points 1) backward to the cross and simultaneously 2) forward to His second coming. Currently, of seeming unimportance to us at this time, is the throne [His and ours] where we will wear our crowns, which have to do with that 1,000 years between His second coming and the surrender of His kingdom to His and our Father.

That was a spiritual mouthful!

27. Moses and Elijah had great and humble lives. They did not know one another here on earth during their regular passage, being separated by hundreds of years, but they may have gotten well-acquainted personally and as co-ministers since they left here. They met with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, and may meet again in Jerusalem as is reported in Revelation 11. They may have been present at the resurrection and ascension – Luke 24:4-7; Acts 1:10-11. Don’t risk your salvation or Christian fellowship on those last possibilities.

28. As a sort of tasty report on that which the Lord is doing here in Corpus Christi, it was reported a few days ago that one of our city councilmen, after enumerating several great things relating to increased jobs, increased businesses, lots of new construction, several new large industries under construction, and a noticeable upgrade in almost all of our high-level leadership, said in an open meeting, “God is doing something here!” The knowledge of His presence and activity is growing. One of these days soon it will be openly noised about that this is His city, that He has taken up residence here, and that driving near will bring you into His presence.

29. “The budget should be balanced; the treasury should be refilled; public debt should be reduced; and the arrogance of public officials should be controlled.” – Cicero, 106 – 43 BC Those Romans were fairly modern, weren’t they!

30. A Thought. This seems to be a reasonable measure of how big and full of loving, powerful action we see our God to be: Do you quickly turn to others when a problem, need, etc. comes to you? Or, do you first and foremost turn to the Lord? Those actions reveal whether we know the Lord is in control. If we know He is in perfect control, we will show trust. Out of that immediately functional trust we find it easy to ask of Him first. We know that He is in control, that He knows all about it, that He has initiated the process and that nothing has a chance of getting out of His control. The surety of divine control is so habitual that we may not even think of calling on others.

Calling on others is o.k.

31. Jacob’s first son was Reuben; his last was Benjamin. Reuben means “behold, a son” and Benjamin means “son of my right hand.” Both have a second meaning, referring to Jesus as the Son of God and as the Son who is sitting at His Father’s right hand.

32. If you, too, have wondered why mankind creates its gods, here is a reasonable answer. Basically, we create gods to have hope. Yes, it is ridiculous that a superior being should carve or mold something of dead material and turn to it in times of any sort of need, asking for help. But that is the way of the flesh.

If we create something, we are superior to it. The created is inferior to its creator. Back to our reason for why humans create gods -- we need the comfort that comes from having one or more higher powers, which we can control, which will be at hand whenever we need them, but will “go away” when we don’t so we can run our own lives without their interference. See Romans 1:18-25.

33. Events and changes in America, in China and around the world give clear evidence that the 21th century is China’s century. China is the rapidly emerging superpower. There are many ways to look at that and worry, fear, grieve, disagree, or in other ways resist the truth.

Unless the Lord comes, or does some almost equally dramatic act, China’s becoming the world’s greatest and possibly only superpower has tremendous positive potential for the kingdom of God. As you would know, that depends on what kind of China emerges. She could be a cancer that metastasizes around the world, or become the foremost Christian nation in all the history of the Church Age.

At this point, with Christianity already growing exponentially in China, its direction seems to depend on an adequate supply of Chinese language Bibles. With adequate numbers of Bibles, it could become a powerful Christian nation that sends millions of missionaries throughout the world. But, not without Bibles. China’s political and military power can be harnessed and redirected toward righteousness. But not without Bibles.

For 50 years, various Christian groups have provided Bibles to underground, persecuted Christians in China. In the 1990s Bibles began to be printed secretly inside China. That greatly increased the number of Bibles, and reduced the cost per Bible. Millions of Bibles have been printed and distributed via underground networks, at the cost of increased persecution and martyrdom. It was God’s time.

The Spirit brings revival; the Spirit plus commitment produces persecution; the Spirit plus commitment plus persecution produces power and exponential revival; and the Spirit plus commitment plus persecution plus exponential revival plus Bibles produces wisdom and direction and faith and endurance. So, the house churches throughout China need Bibles; at this point, 34 million Bibles. That’s a large number, which is wonderful news. It’s not only that a large number of Bibles are wanted, but it’s a general truth that every Christian in China is an evangelist.

There is a great problem. Enough Bibles can never fully be provided while the Chinese church is in such a revival. Yes, what a great problem!! Of course, that raises the question of whether Christians around the world will even try to catch up with the demand. Some will, but the problem is almost unsolvable because, as some major mission groups report, at least five people are saved for every Chinese Bible placed into circulation. To print and distribute those 34 million Bibles [at only $1.80 each!!], $61.2 million is needed. Compare that to the $1.5 million it costs in America to produce one new baptized believer. What an unbeatable $1.80 investment!