THOUGHTS of November, 2018

1. If anyone is going to be shaped into the likeness of Jesus, it will be by the daily process of the cross in our lives. To say the least, that can be unpopular with those who are supposed to be in that daily process – His disciples. The crosswalk is an active process and at times requires deliberate engagement. We “must deny ourselves and take up the cross daily.” For how long? Until we become better? No. Until our individual time of judgment before Jesus Christ at His judgment seat? Possibly. At least until we depart this human body, but possibly until we stand with the Lord in the New Jerusalem. That’s after the rapture, after the 7-year tribulation, and after the 1,000-year millennium.

Do you suppose that we need our crosses until we have been made perfect? Well, I don’t think we know the final answer to that and to a lot of other things, but discipleship involves the tearing down of our imperfection and the infilling of Christ until we are like Him. Thank God for the mountaintop experiences, but the real work, the work of the cross, is being done in the valleys. When we read and are blessed by such as Psalm 34:18-19 we eventually recognize the key words “broken heart,” “contrite spirit,” and “afflictions.” Like a beloved old car, fallen man must be broken down and then rebuilt. The cross is God’s workshop and He is the mechanic.

1. Six or seven years ago when I first spoke to our little congregation on a Sunday morning, I spoke of the need for repentance of our sins, the personal acceptance of Lord Jesus, and [as I recall] the need of joint prayer. At the end, I asked for a show of hands of those who were ready to follow that course. No response. Perhaps it was the Baptist-type words and presentation of the gospel that was not understandable to this Anglo-Catholic group.

Who should repent? Christians. Who should seek a personal relationship with Jesus? Christians. Who should get together and pray for revival? Christians. Revival starts with the church getting before the Lord, seeking His grace to know and repent of our sins, then getting ourselves straight with the Lord. Our apathy, lukewarmness, and secret sins must be discovered and abandoned. That’s a big load to be lifted off our backs before we can be free and readied for spiritual battle. The world is waiting for the real thing in us.

The carnal church does not want to hear about sin, righteousness and judgment – John 16:5-15. It says, “We are the church. We don’t need it. That’s a negative message. We want to hear about love, peace and tolerance. Stop the condemnation!” Those voices do not know the difference between godly sorrow and evil condemnation, showing that they are the ones who need to hear more of the Holy Spirit’s message. If the Lord is going to bring revival to the church we will first have to be convicted of our sin. The Lord helps us with that truth.

1. As responsible Christians, the choice is often up to us. Do we want some nice jewelry, attractive clothes, nifty shoes and to go to a party in our honor, or do we want everything that our father has? Do you really mean your answer? See Luke 15:11-32. Does that change your mind? The first follows our deep conviction of our sins. The second follows staid religiosity and self-righteousness. Of course, that’s just one parable among many applicable ones.
2. James reminded us that faith without works is dead – James 2:17. Might that mean that faithful prayer without obedience is dead? If so, our prayers should become more effective when we stop using them as substitutes for obedience.
3. It is hard to believe that apart from the Lord we can do nothing – John 15:5. Perhaps it’s our definition of nothing that throws doubt on that truth. “Nothing” means “nothing,” which means “nothing, absolutely nothing.” Yet, we humans, faithful Christians and hateful unbelievers alike, continue doing many things, as if to prove that we can do “something” apart from Him. Adolph Hitler and Joseph Stalin and Ted Bundy did **LOTS!** It was something! And we are given to expect future retribution for them because of their somethings, if not for the glorious possibility of their repentance.

Leaving behind us the obviously evil stuff, consider the many good things of the good lives of good people. Is doing good a stamp of the Lord’s activity through us, that we are living and acting as part of Him? Did He say, “Apart from Me you can do nothing called good?” or “When you do good you are part of Me?” No, he said we can do “nothing apart from Him.” “Nothing good” would have been close but “nothing” goes to the heart of the matter. Our best-planned good is nothing if not heavenly connected, directed and empowered. The Key: Active dependence on the Lord. The independent path and the dependent path may eventually lead both to the same temporal service, but the independent path is the fundamental sin of mankind, and the dependent path produces fellowship with the Lord.

In that manner, Jesus always did only what His Father wanted Him to do. He did not have to receive an instruction to get out of bed in the morning, although on certain occasions He might have needed such detailed instructions for that day. It was within Him to live righteously by faith and heavenly focus, not self-focus. That, plus those clear words for direction by the Spirit and His application of the written word and His sense of what His Father would do – gave Him an accurate grasp on His Father’s direction, timing, and action. Thus, when He did something, it had “body.” It was “something.” It had “value,” not because of the quality of the act, but because of His yieldedness to the Source, and its “fitness” with His Father’s wonderful plans. All of that brought heaven into reality on earth, which means material for the kingdom of God/heaven had arrived and the kingdom was being constructed.

All that Jesus did was permanent. It could and would be used as building blocks for the future, on earth and in heaven. The two, heaven and earth, had met in Him and around Him because the kingdom was within Him, its King. In Him it was and is now at hand for others [that’s us] to reach out and grasp. He produced permanent, indestructible reality. That’s something. If I were a betting man, I would bet that you could get aside with the Lord, have a serious conversation with Him, ask Him if you have produced “something” among your already known “nothings,” and He would give you some remarkable assurances. If you do get alone with Him, be alone with Him. That would be time well spent, which is also something.

1. There is a trail of truth: 1) We were enemies of God. 2) Jesus reconciled us to God. 3) Now we are the righteousness of God in Jesus. 4) We are headed into eternity because of our reconciliation. 5) After having had all of that accomplished for us, yet we cannot please God unless we have faith. 6) The smallest amount of faith is enough to please Him. 7) That small faith can start with knowing we are His, and doing something about it. 8) The heavenly workman has customized our individual environments and occasions, so we can perfectly use that measure of faith, and it will be enough. 9) He loved us and acted upon it, which produced and stirs our love for Him. 10) Our love for him motivates us to act upon it by doing what pleases Him. 11) We begin to realize that it is no longer I who live, but Jesus Christ who lives in me. 12) The more we move toward Him, the closer He moves toward us. 13) We begin to suffer because of Him, and we rejoice! 14) The way of the cross opens to us, and we take it. 15) The way of the cross leads us homeward.

I know you. You don’t need to be told that all 15 points are true, livable and God-pleasing.

1. Some words in scripture need to be defined according to their use in variable contexts and according to insight given by the Holy Spirit. Those words are spelled the same wherever used but are differently defined according to their contexts and our insights. For example, in the New Testament the word sinner [singular] or sinners [pleural] means one or more unbelievers, contrasted to born-again Christians. On the other hand, every person sins, including believers, but believers are not referred to as sinners. We are reminded that we, too, sin, but we are believers who sin. We are sinners who have been blood-washed and blood-bought, who are now believers who still at times do sin. We are not living in sin or lost in sin as we were before we were born-again. Having been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, we who were sinners now can still sin but need not. We commit sins but are no longer labeled as sinners.
2. The disciple John heard Jesus say it, the Holy Spirit reminded him of it, and when John wrote his gospel he passed it on for us to live by. That’s a bit of an outline to John 16:13. Notice that John said that the Spirit would guide us into all truth. WOW! Where do we start with that offer? Why don’t we start at the top, with the biggest thing we can imagine that He meant – that we can see and understand things the way that the Lord sees and understands all things. What might it cost us, the potential receivers of more truth?

First, it costs us our ignorance, our intentional and ignorant bliss, and satisfaction with that which we know already. That means we have to choose God’s truth at, potentially, all costs. You know the situation: We ask the Lord for insight into a scripture or a situation but, without intending to, we put limits to His answers. Not good. We don’t have to start with absolutely rejecting all we know, but do start with holding that which we consider “our total knowledge of the complete truth” more loosely. The truth will still be there when we come back to it after chasing down rabbit trails and finding only [important] error. Remember that in Thomas Edison’s search for the truth of the light bulb, he had 1,000 failures before finding the set of facts that unveiled the final truth of the working bulb. He emphasized the importance of knowing each of those untruths in his quest for the truth.

If we don’t at least re-examine that which we already know, everything true or false outside of our box will be rejected, leaving us to continue our searching prayers without finding results acceptable to us. Sometimes accepting His truth, whether in scripture or electronics or exploration or agriculture, costs us everything we have believed in until now. That’s our price for the truth on that occasion, and it leads to extraordinary revelations, such as “the just shall live by faith” [M. Luther], microchips [J. Lilby and R. Noyce], exploring [C. Columbus], or farm tractors [B. Holt]. It is remarkable how ingrained in us are our total ignorances, partial truths and outright lies.

In our quest for the truth, the Spirit first brings us face to face again with Jesus as our fully functional and totally knowledgeable Lord. When that is re-settled, more of the Truth will again be revealed. If not, we will have what we have.

1. I am often asked if the Lord really talks in these days. The answer is “Yes.” The believers of the Old Testament and New Testament days knew the answer to that question for themselves, and I think they would be surprised that so many of our day don’t know the answer, or think that the Lord has stopped speaking to His people. Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice, which places a responsibility on us for being His sheep, meaning knowing Him, depending on Him, following Him and obeying Him as a manner of life. Those sheep hear His voice.

Jesus also said that those who want to do His will will hear His voice. If we want to run our own lives, we can. If we don’t think that we need Him and His directions, we will do our own thing – going off on our own. Paul wrote, by the Spirit, that those former pagans in the church in Corinth were accustomed to dumb [mute, unable to speak] idols [1 Cor. 12:2], then taught them how the Spirit will speak to and through them. We have a living God who speaks to us directly or through others who hear Him. Let’s listen.

1. Many of my present and past relationships are and have been of such quality that I know what they would say if asked almost any question. It is the same with the Lord. Some of His answers would come from the Bible, so I am informed from reading it because He authored it. Other answers come from knowing Him. The ones that come from knowing Him produce sweet memories, solid encouragement, and genuine humility.

We can and should seek and speak God’s wisdom, the things hidden from others but made available to born again Christians by the Spirit. God had planned that back there before He started creating us and things, but His mind is still hidden from those who do not possess His Spirit. It is a Spirit-to-Spirit connection. The Spirit whom He has placed within us knows all things [if He doesn’t know all, He searches God’s mind and finds them], then shows it to us. That’s the setup, so that we may know freely the things given to us by God, which is the mind that Christ had while He was here on Earth and the mind that He wants us to have.

If that sounds like foolishness to you, you have just now labeled yourself a natural person, one who does not have God’s Spirit. You are not a spiritual person because you do not have God’s Spirit within you. All of this paragraph is from 1 Corinthians 2. Read it and praise Him. If you lack, ask Him and He will give you of Himself. Note: None if this Thought ultimately originated from me. It is directly from the Bible and by the Holy Spirit. It’s God’s own thinking. His desire is for your thoughts and my Thoughts to be in line with His, and likewise for all of ours to be together. To enlarge that purpose, I put my Thoughts into print and send them along to you.

1. Jesus chose the twelve to be with Him – Mark 3:14. That one reason was beyond tremendous, but let’s drop down to reason number two for His choosing them – they were to be with one another. That second reason for being together was important, wasn’t it. At first glance it might be thought, “Guys being together?! What’s so big about that? They were with Jesus. That’s what was important!”

Yes, Jesus came to change people individually. He still comes to change people and to be with each one. But He also came to form a body of those individually changed people. If He changed only individuals, chances were that those individuals would soon be doing their own things like not loving one another as themselves, even fighting and killing one another, then separating into sects and denominations, openly condemning fellow Christians, not walking openly together on their cross walks, designing ways to deny communion/the Lord’s Supper to other believers, and simply not loving and serving one another and the world. The result? When He did leave them, they had the Holy Spirt and one another, and labored to maintain the unity of the Spirit. In fact, when they replaced Judas, they chose another who had been with Jesus and them for the whole three and one-half years – Acts 1:20-26.

Jesus had come to change the hearts and minds of individuals so His believers could fit together into being one body, meaning Him – becoming the fullness of Him. How is His project coming along in your congregation? Is there any insight into that project; any desire or progress? Or is it a remote but occasional theological topic? The Lord Jesus is soon coming, siblings, and He is coming for a body that matches Himself. That body may be a remnant of that which currently calls itself “the body of Christ.” If we call ourselves disciples who are walking with Jesus, it will be obvious that we are walking with others, possibly at great personal expense. But that’s the reason we take up our crosses daily and follow Him. Let’s learn Jesus.

1. When was Jesus of Nazareth perfect? Yes, He was perfect from His birth until His death on the cross – His full earth-life. But He was not adequately perfected for His death on the cross when He was 5, 20, or 30 years old because He had to be perfected day by day in the process of His life by the ongoing things He suffered. In fact, He was not adequately and finally perfected until the night of His arrest when He was able to say that Satan was coming for Him but no longer would have a chance to successfully tempt Him. At that time, Satan would no longer find anything in Jesus’ humanity that was temptable – John 14:30. All that He had endured for those years had created in Him the daily obedience and strength He needed [which is the same for us] to choose and stay on the way to the cross. Now He needed the completion of His perfection. He needed to yield into death by Satan’s hands, rejecting His many possible escape routes and going as a lamb to the slaughter.

It is strange that on the evening of His arrest, He had told the disciples to get swords [Luke 22:36-38] because they would need them. But in a few short hours, when Peter started using his sword, Jesus told him and them to put their swords aside, allowing Himself to be arrested and they [the disciples] to escape – Matt 26:52. I view the dismissal of His well-armed body guards as the last part of His perfection process as He yielded His body. He locked into the last 18 hours of His assignment, made perfect.

1. After Jacob had cheated Esau out of his birthright, Esau was ready to kill him. Mother Rebekah sent Jacob out of town so that “both sons would not die in one day” – Gen. 27:45. Why did she think that both would die in one day? Answer: Gen. 9:1-7. Someone in the family would have pursued Esau and killed him. There was to be no leniency as God had granted Cain.
2. Consider this as an annual checkup, meaning that you have read this Thought before. Have you been facing resistance lately, at the office, at home, at church, on the highway? Not all actions of resistance look like the Lord’s resistance, and all are not, but we may be wrongly blaming the devil or humanity or nature – all of which the Lord uses. It may be that policeman who pulled you over and gave you a ticket, with a kind reminder to drive more carefully, and in the spirit you heard the Lord say, “That was Me.” Or that testimony you shared just did not settle well in your soul after you sat down. That Voice then whispered, “Don’t you agree that I should have gotten a bit more credit for that than you got?” James, Jesus’ half-brother, wrote in 4:6 that the Lord resists the proud. The Lord’s resistance is not only a correction, but a protection from your foremost Encourager that can lead to enhancement in our personnel records. We need that.
3. Have you been just a bit lacking in your relationship with the Lord, perhaps lacking only in what to call that lack? He is your Redeemer, Lord and Savior, and you praise Him for those great works of grace. But you have been looking for another title to use in your praises. It is in you in your heart, but have not been able to label it. How about “Friend.” Friend means we delight to be with Him, the more alone the better, to be able to ask Him what you can do for Him, perhaps jointly with only Him. Friends do things together, and friends know special things they can do for the other. If “Friend” fits with you, use it. He has invited those who fit the relationship to use the title – John 15:12-15. Otherwise, seek experiencing His friendship. Don’t settle for the title.
4. God’s people are known for their generosity. Why? What is the basis for Christian generosity? It’s because they live by faith [to a variable extent, of course]. They give of their love, patience, property, finances, time, etc. to a noticeable extent, compared to non-Christians. And there is an even greater difference between Christian nations and non-Christian nations. Islamic nations are downright stingy in their international giving. Christians love strangers, enemies, and neighbors and trust the Lord for providing, so they give beyond the expected amount. The Lord responds in various ways, as faith expects.

King David was generous, helpful, and usually righteous but on occasion he flopped, as he did with Bathsheba. David already was king, had been granted victory in battle and safety in life, had wives, was wealthy in money and all other ways, but had faithful Uriah killed so he could take his wife, Bathsheba. The Lord reminded David of all He had given him, then told him, “if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things than these!” When I hear the Lord say that to David, I hear Him say to me: “Be generous. I have given you much. If you need more, I will give you more.” So, Nancy and I are being more generous for the holidays and onward, at this setting mostly meaning money to charitable organizations.

1. Do you enjoy Him when He tells you only a bit of something, then says that the remainder is a secret? He treated Daniel to that ingredient of friendship, and Daniel was apparently blessed. See Daniel 12:8-13. In verse 12 is our indication that Daniel was blessed by having to wait, because the Lord told him, “How blessed is he who keeps waiting ..” Our flesh tells us that a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush, which is sometimes true.

Then there is Revelation 2:11 wherein the Lord told John that He has some hidden manna to give him and to others later on. That sounds like a surprise party with delightful refreshments toward the end. He went on to say that He had a gift for certain ones, a new name that is secret now to everyone, and will only be revealed to the ones who will receive them. Much is going on for us that we do not know only because He is hiding it. Perhaps we could not be righteously patient if we knew what the secrets are. The hidden manna and the secret name are two birds in the bush but I also thank you Lord for the birds already in the hand?

1. If you were walking down the street and read POHSEEFFOC on the window of a business, what might you think? If you thought, “The painter stood on the wrong side of that window pane” you are right. Many things depend on our being on the right side of things when we see them or when we make our mark.
2. The story teller is an artist. With words and an artful mind, he paints a verbal picture into which the listener enters. In the willing listener’s mind there is a brief suspension of common truth -- a willing suspension of disbelief. There is a sub-creation into which even the healthy and informed mind can actually enter. Once inside, the listener “sees” all manner of things that he had touched on only in his dreams, if even then, and they remain true in the healthy mind only as long as the story telling continues, or until time for an intermission. During the intermission, the sub-creation is unreal and dissectible. But when the artful story teller resumes, the listener again willingly yields his mind to the imaginary.

That scenario occurs with everyone. It may be in a movie or while reading a book, hearing a political talk or gospel sermon. The more we are immersed in “stories,” the more frequently we allow ourselves to settle into sub-creations. Some we may reject outright, some we may accept and enjoy for a spell [pun intended], and some we may accept totally. That is the path of faith in Jesus’s gospel. It also describes the path of falling into sin. Guard your mind. Relax it only into the hands of truth. We are given its responsibility.

1. To be born into the family of God is unimaginable; it requires revelation. We can use our human mind to get a taste, but beyond the human intellect it is unimaginable unless the Lord helps us more through revelation. That’s part of our startling mental makeover when we are born again of the Spirit, when those who are not born-again cannot conceive our newness of life and creature. Neither can we, except that it is.

Then comes our growth, with its spurts, when the religious, non-spiritual ones would like to lock us up for a while. [I understand that!] Our hearts hunger for the fullness of Christ Jesus – all that the Lord has for us – Eph. 4:13. Now that we are through the gate and on the narrow path the continual revelation of Him energizes us to pursue all that is offered.

So now that I’m walking the narrow way, learning and memorizing Jesus’ sayings, imitating Him full-time, and doing good deeds in His name, it seems that I’m missing something. I’m not consistent and, despite my efforts, I feel like I’m being shallow at times. I seem to lack “substance.” Am I living the resurrected life? Answer: if we want to know resurrection life, we must lay down our lives and daily take up our cross. That’s the only way we can follow Him. We can walk across the street from Him, or on the other road, and do all those things that we are already doing, but in the wisdom of God we must die and be buried in order to live as His family. There are too many extra miles, too many cheeks to turn, too many enemies to love for us to try it while “we are alive.” Doing all of that can be done only in the joy of resurrection life. Apart from our crosswalk, we cannot even appreciate it.

1. You know how it is to try, and to try again, and to get up and try again. Will-power helps get things done; but it is limited, isn’t it. Thank the Lord that there is an additional and different power source, and it is available in the faithful believer. It is my Thought that many of us, including believers, do not clearly and adequately identify this additional and different power.

We can grow weary from using our will-power to push ourselves further, not having identified and used the power source that Paul described in Colossians 1:29 that enabled him to labor and strive onward effectively. He knew what it was to labor and strive in the flesh before he met the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus, after which he learned to labor and strive in the Spirit.

Part of Paul’s testimony involved the difference between the two powers and their results – that the Spirit of Christ worked within him mightily beyond his own willpower and determination. He had identified God’s working and God’s power within himself, as a different commodity than his own working and power. He saw it, he identified it, he chose it for himself, and he taught it in detail in Colossians. It was the strength of Christ Jesus in and through him, and offered to us. That’s why he could say, “I can do all things” – Philippians 4:13. It was no longer Paul, but Christ working in and through him. That’s not just a nice, religious way of thinking about things; it is the facts of living as a believer.

1. God created perfect humanity, in various ways, in God’s image. I don’t know where to draw the line between man’s perfection and imperfection at that point, but Adam and Eve had perfect genes and chromosomes as part of their being created in the image God wanted. That is important in this Thought.

Humanity had to fail so God could redeem us entirely by His grace, by a perfectly righteous Man of pure, uncontaminated genes, so we failed, and promptly! God then told Satan His plan, that He [God] would redeem humanity through a male descendant of Eve or from one of Eve’s daughters’ sons. To fulfill that prophecy would require a continually pure gene pool or the redeemer would be a son of Satan, not a son of God. Then Satan got busy contaminating the gene pool through his fellow fallen angels who mated with human women. The gene pool had to be cleansed.

At that time, Noah and his wife and sons had a perfect gene pool [and were faithful] so the Lord chose them to restart the human race with clean genes. All other humans and their half-breed demon-humans were wiped out in the flood. The demons who had been causing the trouble were “sent into eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the greater day” – Jude v. 6. That’s another way of saying they are currently being held in prison where they can do no more damage. So, since the flood there have been no more demon-sires [fallen angels] on earth.

But, apparently Noah’s son, Ham, had a wife whose genes were impure. You notice that Ham’s offspring produced the nations that immediately began having more part-human giants – Gen. 10. The contaminated gene pool again enlarged although there were no longer available the fallen angels. The half-breed giants are the reason the Lord ordered Israel to completely wipe out every human in their cities and tribes when He sent Israel into the Promised Land under Joshua’s leadership. [More on that later.]

In the early generations after the flood, Ham’s descendants, the half-breeds among them, began to show their hatred for God and His ways. They began building a tower that was intended to reach into heaven. The Lord had created mankind with tremendous knowledge and with the ability to devise anything they purposed. All of that ability was “like God” and would have been used to God’s glory and man’s betterment, but their focus was evil [self-focused] – to reach heaven and to make a name for themselves. You have known the story since Sunday School; God confused them by giving them different languages. They scattered abroad over the face of the earth according to their language groups. Their ambitions were crushed, at least so it seemed.

But perhaps there is more to the story than the Lord crushing human self-ambitions so that we could not compete with Him or realize our maximin God-given potential. Notice that He did not put their/our aspirations beyond reach – only beyond our attaining them on our own ability or merit. He did not want to leave us without the desire and involvement [through His grace] to live in God’s kingdom now and forever. There is a righteous route, and He intended for us to go it together, starting with Adam and Eve. There are to be temptations and distractions, as you have noticed, but we are to work freely in open and trusting relationships with God and man. That’s part of the plan, modeled for us as He likewise said to Himselves, “Let Us make.” Our God-given unlimited God-likeness for creativity required unity with Him and others but when our sin messed us up, He and we limited our ability to cooperate as one.

And that point enables us to leap ahead with this Thought. Jesus Christ came to create a body, not only to bring each one of us to life but to bring a united body of many to one mindedness in the love of Christ. After the story of the tower of Babel, the next chapter shows the Lord “starting over” with a small group or nobodies, a remnant, with another man and woman, Abraham and Sarah. God makes and covenants with a new group, a new nation, a nation of faith, a people whom He began choosing out of them and continues by including us with them. Acts 2 explodes as His covenant people go into all the world with the good news that the gates are open into heaven through faith in Jesus Christ. We have a powerful co-creative capacity with the finished and unfinished work of Jesus and the ever-present Holy Spirit.

1. In the end [but the earlier the better], who have you observed that you loved the most? It can be at the end of a meeting or of an encounter, the end of being a member of a church congregation or a job, or the end of anything including the end of life. Who loved you the most and who did you love the most? It doesn’t take much insight to answer, “I loved the one who loved me the most.” Love begets love. We love because we were first loved – 1 John 4:19. If love is not obvious to you [and that is a common affliction], it may be that you have not noticed that when you were at your worst, this or that person flowed toward you. Jesus is our best but not our only example.
2. Israel is working to achieve international recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, and several nations have joined the effort. A recent UN vote on the matter resulted in 128 against recognition and 9 for recognition, so it is still an uphill effort. You know that the United States has long been in favor of Jerusalem being Israel’s capital but would not move its embassy to Jerusalem – based on “what would opposing nations think and do?” Recently we have acted upon that which we long have said we believed. We have moved our embassy to Jerusalem. That had been a slow and painful process, like slowly pulling a tooth. For years we were “in favor” of the move and “believed” the truth but would not act upon that which we favored and believed. Israel, and no one, needs many friends like that.

I liken that to our individual approach to things of the Lord, beginning with deciding if we believe in Jesus as the Christ, then what to do about our decision, or if anything else is necessary, or what will others think or do if we go public. That is a decision that many put off for years, often by not actively and seriously dealing with it. Some seem to slide sideways into some form of belief, awakening one day with recognition of Jesus’ position in the world and in their lives.

At the same time, besides promoting Jerusalem as the recognized capital, there is the necessity of Israel ensuring its sovereignty over Jerusalem. That requires action based upon what Israel believes. The vast majority of Arab Jerusalemites want to live in peace with their Jewish neighbors but Palestinian Authority officials who have legal residence in Jerusalem not only incite the Arab Jerusalemites against Israel but harass and intimidate them and kidnap them and administer illegal punishment. In this way, the Israeli government is not ensuring its sovereignty. Sovereignty includes according all residents equal protection.

I liken this second Jerusalem problem to our individual need to decide whether Jesus Christ is our Lord, our Master, and what action that will call forth from us. if we are to surrender the lordship of our lives to the One whom we say is the Lord, our surrender should show, and will show when we do it. “Why do you call me Lord and not do what I say?” Don’t call Him Lord while not yielding to His sovereignty, His equal access to all of our soul and life.

1. The purveyors of love and hate have been going at it for ages, most notably when Jesus was on the cross, and then continuing into our lifetimes. Hater and hater have also engaged one another, from little spats to world wars. But how about the contests of lovers and lovers. Can you recall the battles of love, the whens and whos, and the outcomes of your love battles with them? I suppose that you have been involved in many of those encounters when you were intent on giving more love than the other could or would give you, and perhaps they intended the same. Both won. Those were wonderful times; now fertile reflections destined for eternal echoes. I have been blessed with such graceful saints and with our love battles. Let’s look at some examples in Scripture.

Naomi, an Israelite, and her two daughters-in-law were all widows. The two daughters were Moabites, and Naomi was going back to Israel. They were a loving and orderly trio. While on the road to Israel, Naomi said, “’Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. May the Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.’ Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, ‘No, but we will surely return with you to your people.’ But Naomi said, ‘Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me.’ And they lifted up their voice and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. Then she said, ‘Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.’ But Ruth said, ‘Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.’ When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.”

That was a three-way battle of love. In my judgment, all of them won a blue ribbon, but Orpah missed out on the echoes, in this earthlife and in the heavenlies. Ruth got them. She became ancestor to King David and King Jesus. She gave up the more immediate and tangible secure life to live by love. Love is more powerful than faith, logic, knowledge, hope, and a passel of other valuables. Theirs was a battle of love, and they all won.

In 2 Kings 2 is recorded another battle of love, with a goodly amount of faith added. Elijah was on God’s schedule to be taken up into heaven by a whirlwind, and everyone seemed to know it. The student prophet, Elisha, was with Elijah. Apparently for several days Elijah kept telling Elisha, “I’m going further. Please, you stay here.” But Elisha would not leave him. When Elijah was taken up, Elisha received God’s and Elijah’s promised rewards for sticking with Elijah. Love battling love is amazing, as one wants the best and most for the other. Both win.

1. We have come through Thanksgiving holidays with at least two blessings – a feast and a boost of thankfulness. Most of us in the West have safe, non-perilous lives and have no trouble with securing food and housing, while many of our brothers and sisters in the East don’t have either. That kind of situation on any scale stirs us to prayer, action, and thanksgiving.

Have you noticed that the enemies of prayer, action and thanksgiving are three-fold: A self-focus, prosperity, and an entitlement mentality [“God and/or man owes me”]. Any grip on our souls by one of those enemies leads to discontentment and dissatisfaction which destroy our gratefulness and block our thanksgiving.

Those who know the Lord peacefully agree that He owes us nothing. It is we who owe Him. He will be faithful to apply His word as it should be applied in our lives, according to many factors, always including His intense, personal love, His majestic power, and His perfectly customized plans for each of us. The words of Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46 ring loud and clear in listening ears. [Those words may apply most directly to nations who did or did not properly relate to Israel, but the Lord’s heart is clearly in them on behalf of all the needy.]

It is possible to be thankful only when we know that all that we have and will have is the result of God’s blessing.

1. Have you noticed that the closer you have drawn to Jesus, the more wisdom and knowledge you have? In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge – Col. 2:3. We are in Him, as in a gigantic library with all creation’s secrets. We approach the Head Librarian and ask for certain knowledge, and it is given. It may be handed to us directly at first asking, or we may be given directions on how and where to find it in the stacks. That’s the usual method in a good library. Jesus is the key to all revelation, really! Seek Him.
2. The Jews all over Israel had a tough time believing that “God does not live in temples made by man” – Acts 17:24. For centuries, the Lord had established His presence in the tabernacle while it was in the countryside and later when it was placed in the temple in Jerusalem. When Jesus came, the Lord’s local presence on earth was in Him. When Jesus left, the Lord’s presence soon came into the church. About 40 years later the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by Rome but the church grew in numbers and power.

The term “church” applies only to the born again, called out [of the world unto Him] people of God, never to the man-built structures that are now commonly called a church. “God does not live in temples [or churches – ed.] made by man.” Man-built also refers to the human religious institutions that man builds. That is a tender matter often and best left to the Lord until the time when He sends forth His angels to separate the wheat from the tares – Matt. 13:24-30; 36-43. But the church is to be aware of the situation. The wheat are to know; the tares cannot.

1. Here are some thoughts and information pieces about our being in a primarily spiritual world, continually, and in everything.
2. Isaiah 14:12-15 – In the midst of speaking about the king of Babylon, Isaiah’s message enlarges to focus on Satan’s being cast out of heaven onto the earth and headed for hell. The Babylonian king personified Satan and may have been possessed by Satan, like those Jesus cast demons out of and like many who were demon-possessed.
3. Ezekiel 28:13-19 – The same thing happens to Ezekiel as he was prophesying about the king of Tyre.
4. Job 38:7 – The angels [sons of God] were created before humanity, and possibly before the earth was created.
5. 1 Corinthians 6:3 – We believers are going to judge the angels. This implies we judge the evil angels for their evil deeds, probably focusing on their deeds during the time of humanity on earth, possibly for their rebellion in heaven and on earth, or possibly for the things they personally did to each of us, their judges. If not before, then we will know of all their evil deeds so we can judge them perfectly.
6. Hebrews 2:9 – Jesus was and humanity is lower than the angels, although Holy Spirit resurrection power working in and through us elevates us to sonship and gives us positional and functional victory over them. That’s similar to comparing teenager David to Goliath the giant whom he defeated, although David and other Holy Spirit anointed ones of the Old Testament remained servants of God.
7. Zechariah 5:9 – There are female angels. So …?
8. Matthew 22:30 – It has been wrongly understood that angels cannot procreate. It is true, according to Jesus in Matthew 22:30, that the angels in heaven [the faithful, obedient ones] do not mate, but it is also true that they can mate, as did the fallen ones [with human females] – Gen. 6:1-4.
9. The Promised Land was inhabited by tribes that were loaded with giants. They were the half-breed descendants of fallen angels and human women. During Noah’s flood, the fallen angels were jailed in hades where they will stay until a time during the tribulation, and then their judgment [by us] – Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2:4, 9. That put an end to fresh generations of half-breeds but left the gene pool among humans.

After the flood it is noticed in Genesis 10 that Ham [the middle of Noah’s three sons] must have had a wife who carried the genes of the fallen angels. Noah’s genes were clean [Gen. 6:9] and his sons’ genes were clean, but by Ham’s marriage were produced the people who inhabited Canaan [the future Promised Land, named after Ham’s son, Canaan]. It was because of these giants and other people who carried the devil’s genes that the Lord commanded Israel to destroy every human in those cities and regions.

Why destroy every trace of contaminated genes? Because the Lord had created humanity in His image and called His work “good” or “perfect.” When He told the devil that fallen Eve’s seed would crush the devil’s seed’s head, the devil immediately set about to taint all humanity with his seed, genetically and behaviorally. Thus Genesis 6:5-8. As usual, if the devil could prove God a liar or incapable of fulfilling His word on just one occasion, God’s word would be fallible and the devil would have won, meaning be free from God’s judgment.

1. Deuteronomy 9:4-6 – Why the Lord chose Israel to conquer Canaan. Because Israel had nothing to offer the Lord except trust and obedience, and that by God’s grace. This is a good word to us, whom He has chosen to do the same in our land. And the Lord often did their fighting for them as they watched. See Josh. 3:7-17; 5:1; 10:7-11; 22-26. Israel’s work was impossible, like David’s against Goliath, but the Lord worked through them [as through us] or fought in front of them [as in front of us].
2. The Lord has several always good reasons for not answering our prayers, among which are: 1) We are not yet ready for the answer or the complete answering – Deut. 7:22. 2) For testing and training of the newer saints – Judges 3:1-4.