THOUGHTS OF OCTOBER, 2013

1. Experience is not what happens to you, but what you do with what happens to you. As the Lord is our Potter and we His lumps of clay, so we are the potters of our clay lump experiences. We can make of them what we want, although we are not given the opportunity to select all of our lumps – some, yes; some, no. But selecting our own lumps is not that important because we have a Selector in heaven who selects perfectly for us.

After He has considered all things on our behalf He turns the lump over to us, thereafter giving us abundant potter’s tools and training so we can please Him by doing our best for Him. There is no way to lose, unless we reject the lump He selects for us, or we decide to make for Him a sewer pipe instead of a beautiful vase of our lump.

2. Everyone who does not personally own an immediately available cemetery is a most miserable person. Each of us needs a large cemetery in which to quickly bury the sins of both friends and enemies, without taking the time to embalm them for preservation and recurrent review.

3. Biblical and true contemporary prophecy is a very powerful tool of the Holy Spirit as we present the gospel. It provides a view [sometimes clearly and sometimes not so clearly] into our temporal and eternal situations – past, present and future. Some views are “merely” frameworks; some provide specifics. All are important, which should be obvious because they are given to us from God, who supplies faith and additional insights.

Our Father has given us great light to walk in, for personal righteousness and for understanding of His times. When the church is eventually granted the unity that Jesus prayed for us [or, said in a humanly-focused way, “When the church eventually gets it act together”] the world will be clamoring to be a part of that which the church knows is going on, what is coming next, and how to prepare for it. But, as long as believers do not believe, how can the world believe? In our present condition, why should the world not look at some of us much as it now does – a psychologically dependent organization of simple-minded religionists who otherwise have trouble coping with the world?

I suppose that one weakness in our approach to prophecy is that we read or hear it and do not apply it to our lives. We tend to think prophecy is interesting but, if we are interested in changing according to Holy Spirit-presented prophecy, don’t see how it should change our lives. But there are those whose lives are and should be changed by relocation, redirection, preparedness, revitalization and any other action necessary to respond to the prophetic information.

Prophecy is meant to give us a strategic outlook and plan so that we not only know what it says but respond to what it says.

4. The world’s Muslim population is around 1.6 billion. There is only 1 [known] Christian missionary to every 500 thousand Muslims. That’s 1:500,000. Why have we lost our zeal for taking the gospel to the lost world, especially to Muslims? I will venture to say that the leading reason is that we don’t want to lose our lives for the gospel’s sake. Martyrdom has lost its righteous appeal.

Equally, at home our reluctance to move to the “other side of the tracks” to be among that poor and sometimes dangerous population is that we don’t want to lose our comforts for the gospel’s sake. Discomfort has lost its righteous appeal.

With the loss of attraction to LIFE-giving martyrdom and discomfort for the gospel’s sake, there must be something else that has filled the vacuum. I’ll offer this: the “life” given through comfort and the “bless me” gospel. Have you a more personal answer?

5. It is of the highest level of importance that we keep our peace [enter and stay in God’s rest]. To do otherwise is to have “an evil, unbelieving heart” – Heb. 3 & 4. That refers to our having a life of peacefulness and restfulness over life’s items. In fact, we are told to fear the possibility that we might come short of that rest. The additional good news is that we have His infallible word that by exercising a due amount of diligence we can enter into and stay in that rest – Heb. 4:11.

When we don’t have a peaceful and rested soul/personality it is because we have “my life” and “my thing” to attain to or maintain. “My life” and “my thing” are also known as “me.” Our problem is not the life or the thing but that we have claimed it as “mine!” That’s a heavy, pressure-filled existence, is it not? [All of us should have enough insight to be able to say “YES” at that question.] To control the world and its universe as it all revolves around “me,” being God, becomes a job only for a real God.

We meet threats to “my life” at every turn. We have to quickly evaluate and calculate all of the constantly changing forces. Our counterfeit smiles do a poor job of covering souls that are crying out for the reality of relief, for peace. It’s a heavy thing to be God over even the smallest thing, especially when it is “my” life.

Actually, we can relax. The only thing that will not be attained or not maintained while we keep our peace is that which is not of God. Our own stuff will falter and fail, and in many cases the sooner the better. We can do a lot of pumping and treading water to get things going or to keep them going, but it will be done in the flesh. All that collapses will be that which should collapse. God’s thing will endure, now and forever. No matter the apparent results, it will be judged by the Righteous Judge as “righteous works,” and all else as “nothing.”

One problem is that we cannot believe that anything we have labeled as “good” or “mine” may not be of God, or that our way and timing is not God’s way and timing. When we run our universe that way, it really is stressful. Choose to rest. Turn your godship over to Him.

6. It has been well-said that Christianity is a relationship, not a religious institution. That which I am going to say supports that position, although before I’m through with this Thought I will come back and partly dispute it.

God personalizes, man institutionalizes. God gives life; man makes a statue of it. Institutionalization breeds more institutions. Unbelief in the supernatural compels us to depend entirely on the natural, which is easy to institutionalize. In a time of trial, the ones who know the lordship of Christ will remain at peace. Those who depend upon institutionalized religion have only that god to rely upon, so why should not they tremble? Institutions are set up to continue that which the Lord said or did at one time and are maintained as monuments to that past reality. Institutions and monuments become objects of worship, replacing spiritual worship of the Lord Himself. Religious relics, statues, services and practices are meant to lead us to the Lord but that effort must ultimately fail as it does the predictable – lead us to worship those things instead of the Lord.

In Mexico there was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon many, including Roman Catholic priests, who had their eyes opened to certain ungodly practices in the church. One of those practices was that the people were worshiping statues of religious personalities – the saints. When the enlightened priests tried to remove the statues the people prevented them, telling the priests themselves to leave the church because “the statues were here before you came.” Worship of the statues had become deeply institutionalized. Nothing was wrong with those saints, nor actually with the statues [debatable – ed.], but man institutionalizes that which the Lord had personalized.

When the church becomes “our church” instead of Jesus’ church, when He ceases being the functional Lord of our relationship and institutions, we are left with “our beliefs” and “our church.”

Here is my promised “come back.” The toxicity of institutionalization is diminished when we realize its shamefulness and return to our living, personal relationship with Jesus.

7. I can remember recently, far into the past, and during the 50 years in between those two poles that I tended to at least lightly reject those weak in faith, or pressure them in some way when they resisted taking their next step ahead with the Lord. Instead, I should have remembered that the youngers are exactly that – youngers – and grant them time and space as such. At those times I have not been grown up enough myself to allow them to be that which they were -- immature. Paul wrote the saints in Rome [14:1] that they should welcome those who are weak in faith, and not try to force them into growth.

8. Saints, why let our feelings and emotions control us? We all understand that problem, and that it is a weakness in our souls which we all respond to differently. Happiness and joy are in that mix. Happiness is situational and joy is both foundational and eternal. Joy is a spiritual force within the believer.

It is so easy for the young Christian to be manipulated by his/her feelings and emotions, as you and I remember very well. We were subject to being overwhelmed, stressed and depressed. Those temptations have not ceased, although growth in spiritual maturity have reduced our tendencies to yield in those areas.

9. I live among a fellowship of adult brothers and sisters who rise to their feet on particular occasions. The men rise when a lady enters the room; honoring her presence. Men and women rise when another man or woman enters the room, honoring Jesus’ presence. Sadly, only some of the children have been taught to rise when an adult enters.

Question: Why rise? 1) It is a good social grace in our and many cultures. 2) It honors the other, by personage or relative social/church/business/etc. position. 3) It honors Jesus in the believer. 4) It is an act of open humility. 5) You can probably add more reasons of your own. If you don’t want to rise, you probably should be the first up.

My older brother graduated college with a drafting degree. He never did any further college work, and had no formal education to do with engineering, except his drafting. Long before he retired he had become the chief engineer of a national engineering firm. He was loaded with engineering patents. It was told us by his co-workers that when he entered the room, the entire Board of Directors arose. That’s the sort of honor we should have and display when someone containing the spirit of Jesus enters our presence.

10. Recently I had a delightful opportunity to talk to and with a group of committed Christian business men about being foolish. We defined being foolish as knowing God’s will and not doing it. Then we talked about some of our obediences to the Lord and subsequently being considered foolish by others.

When we had finished the 45 minute talk and sharing it was [mostly] agreed that the Lord calls us to do many things that are called foolish by others, particularly by those who do not know the Lord’s ways and that He communicates His will quite well and often. Some of us suffered harsh judgments by those who loved us but did not believe our call or share our faith. In that case, foolishness was in the eye of the beholder.

Then we dealt with our own feelings of being fools as we wrestled over whether to obey or disobey that which we believed was God’s will. We selected significant examples, such as going on a dangerous missionary trip with spouse and children, or leaving a good job and home to live and serve in a ghetto community, or forsaking family to answer God’s call. The examples were endless as we reviewed testimonies from Scripture, church history, and our own lives.

We perceived that any wrestling within ourselves about the foolishness of responding to “outrageous and unwise” callings were no more than our flesh fighting against our Spirit. It was foolish to wrestle too long over whether to be obedient, and certainly foolish to disobey.

Closing remarks were centered around whether it was part of the normal Christian life to have those very foolish acts scattered about our lives like salt and pepper on food. It was a sober time.

11. When is Acts 7:22 insufficient for us, as it was for Moses? Answer: When we encounter Exodus 3:11 and 4:10 which, as with Moses and Jesus requires some time in our own personal wilderness – an experience we may not embrace or think beneficial at the time.

12. If asked what could be our greatest joy, we would hear lots of good answers and they would probably be on all levels of earth-life and heaven to come. John the Baptist, who was not a born again Christian but was filled with the Holy Spirit, gave us his answer. He said his greatest joy was to stand in the presence of the Messiah and to hear His voice – John 3:29. I’ll accept that for myself. In fact, that blessing presents us with a blessed opportunity and a prime responsibility; to respond to Him with a soft heart – Heb. 3:7.

13. What are the essentials if a congregation is to show forth Jesus? G. M. gives us three: 1) Jesus is Lord of every believer’s personal life and of the collective life of the church body to which he belongs. 2) Jesus Christ actually expresses the fullness of His life, power, and love in the daily fellowship of the congregation as it commits itself to live as a community, live His teachings, and proclaim His gospel in word and example. 3) Divine love is freely expressed in the fellowship of believers, it being the most eloquent testimony of Christ’s life and power.

14. Being faithful unto death is the mark of a martyr – Rev. 2:10. Yet, it seems that physical martyrdom is not the only call to that level of faithfulness. While physical death is done once and it is over, perhaps the toughest martyrdom is the living death of bearing one’s cross daily. Being faithful unto death when it takes 50 or 20 or 2 years is another story. Taking up our cross daily, denying self, and following the Lord is true martyrdom. All are called to that walk, but I have been impressed with more righteous wives doing it than righteous husbands. My sampling of the saints may be too few to be accurate.

15. Have you noticed that you do not have to devise opportunities to diminish yourself so that Jesus can increase in you? The world [by the Lord’s carefully customizing hand] sees to it that we have multiple opportunities every day. We probably do not notice and record them, but I think we face and [mostly] pass the tests all through the day. Some may be only mental, such as decisions and attitudes. Others are decisions and actions.

As long as we are in this world we will have tribulations [John 16:33], so we certainly don’t have to occupy ourselves with planning them for ourselves. Planning how to pass the tests, yes; but how to devise them, no.

Let’s make the most of every test, many of which require close attention and deliberateness, don’t they! Otherwise, if we don’t understand and cooperate with the Holy Spirit, we may become bitter instead of better. Many of those tests seem to be designed to destroy us, or to humiliate us, but they are the exact things that the Lord had designed to refine and mold our character – sickness, marriages, bosses, financial problems, etc. The mold that our soul’s melted gold is poured into is the image of Jesus.

Delayed answers to our prayers is a common test. If we give up believing simply that the Lord has His best planned for us, we can miss His response even though it parades before us. Jesus designs His answers and their timings. In John 6:5-6 He designed a major need, knew what He was going to do to fix the problem, let it become obvious to everyone that there was an impossible problem, then solved it while incorporating human effort with His miraculous results.

Take heart. It will be more than worth your painful faithfulness.

16. Saint, you will not be surprised to know that God has a will and a purpose, and that his will and purposes include all persons, things, times and circumstances. Read Ephesians 1:11. There is no way to get around that statement, except by the well-traveled route of unbelief.

Your and my lives have His purposes. But what, you may say, if I do not fulfill His purpose for me? That has been no surprise to the One who is currently in all that we call past, present and future. Our many failures and weaknesses have glorified Him, especially as we repented and drew closer to Him.

But what, again you may say, if I did not repent and still deny Him? That, too, has been part of His plan concerning you. You may have been His greatest perfector of others as you fulfilled the office of “tester” in the church. Many saints have risen above your ill-will and tiresome actions and become overcomers because of you. Of course, your reward for filling that church office is not eagerly sought by many.

The Creator has brought nothing into being without first having completed it and its purpose in His own mind. He has not had to make things up as time and actions progressed.

17. What gives you peace or, conversely said, what causes you to lose your peace? That’s the same question both ways. The honest answer may be; a roof over my head, bills paid up, food in the pantry, good health, loved ones happy, and other peace-producing things of the world. Nothing is wrong with having those world-necessary things all lined up and available. We should get a sense of fulfillment when our labors have good results in those ways.

But when we don’t have those things, or when we have them and are threatened with their loss, we are at least tempted to lose our peace. I have checked myself many times during my walk with the Lord when I saw myself losing my peace over loss of things, or of control, or of many other of the world’s peace producers. I knew that my gods had become those things that caused me to lose my peace.

Peace is a spiritual fruit. It comes and becomes enduring by walking with the Lord through life’s good and tough places over years of time. Peace is also a result of keeping our focus on the Lord. My point is that we have peace in stressful situations when the Lord is our focus. He said: “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” John 14:27 The peace of God cannot be taken from us.

18. After we get past the Lord Jesus’ mission statement of two laws, 1) Love the Lord with everything you are and have, and 2) Love your neighbor as yourself, all of our additional mission statements and church covenants pale to nothing. I suppose that additional statements and covenants do the job of explaining some of what Jesus’ two laws may mean, but they cannot encompass or improve them.

In the face of that which I have just said, here are a few pointers that may help us step over some of the land mines encountered on our crosswalk. First, be real. Face the often difficult decision to be or not be open and honest. Our flesh, the world and the devil war against simplicity, honesty and openness. Second, serve others. Don’t do everything everyone wants, but be available and effective on the personal level. Let others decide if you are important. Third, respect others, especially the least persons. Lift them up and try to avoid being lifted up among men. Fourth, relate to people personally and warmly. Open your life so that the Lord can lead others into it as far as His grace designs. This really helps carry out that part of the Great Commission that commands us to make disciples vs. make babes and leave them eternally shallow.

19. Have you had any trouble with unexplained despair, episodes of unexplained depression, or unexplained sense of being overcome? When those times come I may not notice them at first, but in due time I realize their presence. There is nothing I can do about stopping them, so I simply acknowledge to the Lord that I am in an unexplained spiritual battle of His design and purpose, and it will end when He has accomplished His results. That is my faith position. It is an accurate one.

King David had those times, and every human has had them. In Psalm 42 David asks why he is in such despair [v. 5-7]. He knows the episode will end because the Lord is indeed the Lord [v. 8-11]. David’s is a good, usable testimony which Peter had read and understood firsthand – 1 Peter 4:12. I’m thankful that the Holy Spirit nudged those two brothers to pass it along to us.

20. The best answer to that often-asked question, “When will the Lord Jesus return?” was given by Himself. Even though He did not know the answer [Mark 13:32] He told us many clues of His return. I want to mention only one point about His return.

Many have said that He could return now or at any time because all has happened that He said our Father requires. However, there are some big howevers. The Lord told Abraham that all peoples [ethnic groups] would be blessed through him – Gen. 12:3. That has not happened yet. Also, Jesus said that every nation [ethnic group] in the world would hear the gospel before the end would come – Matt. 24:14. There are yet ethnic groups who have not heard the gospel.

Jumping ahead into Revelation 5:9, we see that indeed every tribe and language and people and nation will be represented before the throne. That is repeated in Revelation 7:9. As of today, there would not be a representative from many tribes. Many tribes have never heard the gospel.

That doesn’t mean we should take a deep breath and sit back. It means we should go or enable others to go, [especially perhaps] to those untouched tribes.

21. “Not yet” does not mean “No,” unless we are so needy or impatient that any delay seems to be a “No.” However, every “Not yet” is more than a “Not now.” All “Not yets” are also announcements that there is a “Yes” on the way. Initially, the “Not yet” or “Later” may leave us feeling let down, destitute, and unloved, even though we have the promise that “Yes” is coming. The disciples felt that way in Acts 1:6-11 when they wanted the Lord to set up His kingdom “Now.” He told them “Not yet.”

As with those disciples, the Lord’s “Not yets” are also announcements that He will provide all that is needed in the interval. Whether it is comfort, finances, power, food, grace to die gracefully, etc. He will provide until that which is on the way has arrived. Our lives depend upon our believing Him.

Joining verses 8 and 9 of Hebrews 2, which I understand is probably an accurate thing to do, makes the conjunctive sentence read: “But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him, but we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels …” That means the world is obviously not perfectly, orderly, voluntarily, functionally subjected to Jesus. He now controls it in ways that His control does not appear. But the day is coming in which His control will be obvious, and until that time we have Him! That is a promise for the future with a provision for the interval.

We have something in store that is inevitable, and an abundant provision in the meantime. For the saint who abides in the kingdom of God, that is a revelation poured in concrete and is sufficient until our King fulfills His promise. All of the unsubmitted contrariness going on around us does not disturb the Rock on which we stand. The King is coming, His kingdom is firm, and we are standing.

22. At a certain time in eternity each of us will stand before the Lord and be granted understanding. Apparently, some of that understanding will have to be explained to us – Matt. 7:21-23. At that time I suppose that we will have the ability to grasp that which He explains to us, and to accept truth and justice. I think that one of the major things to be revealed to us at that time will be the process and fulfillment of His ultimate purpose in our lives and in all things. We will be able to look back and see how all things were always working to bring about God’s plan for us and for all His creation. That includes things we call good and evil. It is good for us now, in this life, if we can see, like Joseph, that the Lord is always on the job, fulfilling His master plan and that we are vital parts of it.

23. In Luke 18:1 “Jesus told His disciples a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.” Let’s look at that in a different way than “we all should pray always and not lose heart,” because I don’t think He said that.

It is good to see to whom Jesus addressed his words. Some were to disciples, some to the multitudes, some to His natural family, some to Jewish leaders [some godly and some ungodly], some to Gentiles, and some to Satan, etc. As you know, or can understand by reading that list, to whom He addressed His words made all the difference.

Back to verse 1. Jesus addressed those words to His disciples, then and now. Disciples were/are those who forsook all to walk with Him and to live the life of faith that He taught. I don’t believe that He would have told non-disciples that they needed to pray always. Why? Because a non-disciple does not put his life in jeopardy for the sake of the gospel, but a disciple does.

The word to a person who is living by faith is “pray continually and don’t give up.” Those instructions are to those who are breaking down the gates of hell and are in danger. They are out on a limb, voluntarily. Non-disciples are content to be at peace and in a place of temporal safety.

Besides that, it is my observation that I pray more when I and mine are in jeopardy, and less when in temporal safety. And you?

24. A poster in college: “Tough semesters don’t last; tough students do.”

25. In Genesis 2 the tree of life was given to Adam for him to eat of its fruit [so he would live forever]. In chapter 3 Adam sinned so God took that tree away so mankind would not live forever [in sin]. The fruit [reward] of the righteous ones is [being] a tree of life. In Proverb 13:12 fulfilled desire is equated with a tree of life. Jesus was hung on a tree of death/life, and calls us to follow Him on our own crosses. In Revelation 22:2, 14 the tree of life is shown on the remade surface of Earth, bearing continual fruit – which [fruitfulness] is promised to those who love Jesus more than all else – Rev. 2:7.

The cross is a tree of life to those who embrace it.

It seems to me that all of Scripture’s comments on the tree of life have to do with Jesus’ and our crosses. Jesus’ cross gives LIFE. Our crosses give us and others LIFE. That life is our reward, the fruit of our pursuit of Jesus. The way to it is by loving Him more than all else.

26. Where among the individuals in the church resides God’s power? Not “where is God’s authority in the church” but “where is God’s spiritual power in the church?” It’s is all too often [almost always] in the preachers and perhaps in a few laymen. Yet, it seems that every Scripture reference to that power says it is for all who believe. What happened and why is it still going on?

27. “Baptismal moments” [when we are immersed into a new ministry, calling, marriage, have a baby, etc.] are always followed by a wilderness experience with adequate temptations, all customized to drive us into the Lord for all we need to do well and live righteously. We need not be surprised or overcome when fiery trials come upon us shortly after a grand blessing. See Elijah’s experience in 1 Kings chapters 18 and 19.

28. Peter confessed Jesus as the Son of God by revelation, which was aided first by observation and information gathered over the time he had by then lived with Jesus – Matt. 16:15-16. He was also informed, at least somewhat, although he was an uneducated fisherman, by the Scriptures he had heard and learned in Synagogue.

But one way he had not learned that Jesus was the Son of God was by Jesus telling him. Peter had not been schooled by Jesus, was not taught to repeat, “Jesus is the Son of God,” was not told that if he repeated that several times and applied himself to believing it, that it would become truth to him and that he would believe it later when asked. No, it was by revelation from the Spirit, aided in advance by observation and gathered information. Confession in order to attain to something is not the way to revelation. That technique may help imprint knowledge in our memory but confession of Truth comes after the Spirit turns on His light bulb.

29. Wounds from an enemy are expected, whether physical or verbal or etc. However, wounds from a friend are usually unexpected and certainly more painful. An exception to the “unexpected wound from a friend” is that Jesus expected Judas, one of His 12 disciples, to betray Him. He knew His Bible and had Holy Spirit illumination for personal application of the Bible.

Zechariah [13:6] experienced Jesus’ pain prophetically, and wrote: “And one will say to him, “’What are these wounds between your hands?’ Then he will say, ‘Those with which I was wounded in the house of those who love me’ [literal translation – ed.].” As it played out by the Holy Spirit, that/those friends were Judas the betrayer, the other 11 disciples who forsook Him, and the Jewish religious leaders who had Him crucified.

How tragic it is for Him when it now happens to Him in the house of God, Christ’s body, the Church. We, His brothers, whom He has never offended, amputate ourselves and others from His body, speak unkindly of Him [“Him” = other Christians], do not love Him with everything we are and have, nor love our neighbor as ourselves.

I have been on both sides of the matter.

30. William H. Walton, living American successful businessman and Christian [not Bill Walton of WalMart fame] reminds us to live with a clean soul. He is quoted as having said: “To carry a grudge is like being stung to death by one bee.” Let’s don’t stop at only agreeing with him.

Until next time: Isaiah 58:7.