THOUGHTS OF MARCH, 2016

1. “The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.” – F. Scott Fitzgerald [1896-1940], American novelist and short story writer, Catholic.

If that is the case, we Christians are not very intelligent and don’t want to be. When we see what appears to be two opposing views in Scripture or among the brethren [the church], we either reject one view for the other, or make them un-fit together. We are not very good at accepting and working with the unsolvable. By the way, science does a great job of doing this.

What I have done with apparent disagreements in the Bible or among believers, ever since I understood that I do not have God’s understanding of many things and His full mind on nothing, is that I do not need to immediately settle the issue. I believed both, and continued walking with the Author of Scripture and His people. Gradually some of those seemingly opposed views cleared up as I learned more Bible and loved His people. I became more familiar with the Lord and His, and how He and they thought and felt.

So, if you are able to hold two opposing ideas in your mind at the same time [and teach them!] you might be first-rate in more than intelligence.

2. The world did not change when Jesus came and went 2,000 years ago. Only that part that received Him changed. All else continues as before. However, when He comes back all will change. In the meantime, let’s let Him keep changing us and the world through us.

3. God is love. That little sentence is meant to bring us together at least at the same starting point for this Thought. Humility is an aspect and taste of God’s love. That’s why humility is so important within God, to God, and for us. Humility is experienced and perfected in us when we take up our crosses and follow Jesus.

As born again Christians we have been made one in Christ. In many cases that oneness does not show among us and to the world that is watching us. But when our humility is real, it enables others to see, desire, and apprehend that unity for themselves. I am talking about the quality of unity that empowers us to live [and, as is often necessary, to suffer] in God’s established order. Examples: God the Trinity, husband and wife, families, congregations, the church, the church in the workplace, etc.

Our humility is a powerful tool in God’s hands.

4. No pressure or manipulation is necessary when Jesus is lifted up. He said that He would draw all men to Him if we would lift Him up – John 12:32. Lifting Him up is the message to us; our instructions. I know that there are many ways to lift Him up, but it seems that the most powerful way is to individually live the gospel and corporately love one another. That forms a powerful corporation.

And you noticed that He said He would draw those “all men” to “Himself.” Good lives draw some people to good living, but Jesus-living draws people to Jesus. Fallible, gospel-living, like-Christ individuals and fallible, gospel-living like-Christ congregations draw people to Jesus. At that point He is irresistible; not many will just sit there eating popcorn. They will either jump into Life with you or jump on you with both feet.

The choice is to, 1) go with Jesus or 2) spin our obvious fallibility, shun the gospel-life, settle for being good Christians, and dry up into a religious organization.

5. C. B. points out that the reason we are not more full of Christ is that we are too full of ourselves. If we are going to grow spiritually it will not be by learning more Scripture or perfecting our theologies or becoming more religious. It will be through becoming less of ourselves so that within us can grow more of Christ. As He emptied Himself to become how He should be, so must we empty ourselves to become how we should be.

Becoming less is not a universally acclaimed project. John the Baptist had it in focus [John 3:30] and Jesus lived it full-time. The way up is down, and the way down is up. If we will humble ourselves, He will lift us up in due time. If the prospect of that process doesn’t bother your flesh, you are already perfect [meaning that you are on schedule with God’s timing of His process for you].

6. If you notice that you are not hungering and thirsting for the Lord as much as you did “at first,” consider this: Jesus said that He is the bread of life; that those who come to Him would never hunger or thirst. If your hunger and thirst is waning, you may have been feeding on the things of Him, not on Jesus Himself – things like His blessings, His ministries, His service, His power, His people, His church, or His gifts. All of those things are wonderful and necessary, but focus on Jesus and feed on Him. If you do, you will never hunger or thirst. We have that on great authority – John 6:35.

7. Some use the term “divine appointment” to label an encounter in which the Lord did something remarkable. Actually, all of life is a continual flow of divine appointments, but they can be seen as such only if we are walking in the Spirit. When we live in continual fellowship with Jesus we see the truth of life, that He is deliberate and active full-time with us. If we don’t walk with Him that way, only the “tops of the mountains” show His handiwork, with the remainder of life being in the clouds or below the clouds out of our sight. That makes life look much less than it really is, perhaps and only at times dropping into it “divine disappointments.”

8. Have you wondered why Moses and the Holy Spirit started with, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” and then launched into God’s process of creation? The wonderment can be why He did not introduce God there at the beginning, or describe something of God and His intent, or start with some other better beginning. To some it seems to be an abrupt beginning, with so much of the past omitted and no introduction to God.

The Lord has His own reason for doing as He did, but a human-level reason is that He did not need to introduce Himself to Israel though Moses’ writings. They had known Him, known of Him, believed in Him, seen His miracles, seen His earthly appearances in human form, heard His voice, followed His instructions, and received His blessings for their obedience and His curses for their disobediences, etc. for hundreds of years. In short, Moses only needed to start with, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” like you start your letters to acquaintances with a simple introduction of yourself and why you are writing, not with your autobiography.

9. Similar to the previous Thought, why did God rest on day seven? Again, He had His own reason(s) but He gave us an understandable human reason. He was providing us with a model. First, in the Old Testament it was a day of physical-mental rest and a sharper focus on God after 6 days of work and in preparation for 6 more days of work for man and beast. Then, in the New Testament, in Christ, believers have entered our Sabbath Rest, our full-time rest of soul, which brings us closer to the revelation of God’s own reason(s) for the practice of resting. God has no reason to work; His presence is powerful, His righteousness is overpowering, and His thoughts are effective. He worked to establish an impossible route to God-hood for humanity that humanity must choose to reject in order to enter the God-hood by resting.

10. Since the beginning of my walk with the Lord in 1964, I have been blessed by God’s provision of brothers who were prophets. They have been vital to my spiritual health, direction, and ministry events. When He removed one, He supplied another. I have experienced the truth of Acts 2:17-18 and 1 Corinthians 14:1. You might be able to say the same, although prophets may not be as obvious in your religious tradition as they have been at times in mine. They, like apostles, evangelists, pastors and teachers, are nevertheless present in spiritually alive congregations because the Holy Spirit is the one who calls them forth, anoints them, and motivates them to speak and be what He has made them – even if their denominations and congregations do not acknowledge their office or their presence. They and those around them may not know they are prophets, but they are, and they are there. They simply speak profound truths from the throne of God at critical times, whether in times of duress or in simple conversation. Listen for them.

11. Over the years I have taught that people and situations are God’s report cards on how we are doing with Him. The natural is clearly experienced, while the spiritual can be missed. John wrote, by the Holy Spirit, in his first epistle at 4:20, that the love we do or do not have for God is shown by our love for our brother. My obvious relationship and actions with my brother helps me do what I should often do – judge myself so that I will not need to be judged [in that matter] by the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ. What a help!

12. Is there anyone who has the authority in your life to re-direct you contrary to the flow of your strongest will? If not, ask the Lord to help you find that one or more persons. Let him/her know that they can blow the whistle on you at any time they see that you need it. I don’t think your spouse should be that person [that would be confusing]. We all have those who advise us and give us counsel and who hold some areas of responsibility over us, but I am speaking here of someone who cares enough for you, and that you have given that place in your life, that they will say “No” or “Yes,” “Stop” or “Go” and you will do it – perhaps after some deep conversation and prayer together. Otherwise we will find ourselves doing what is right in our own eyes, thinking that we have God’s leadership and blessing on it. Humility will help you find that person and establish that covenant.

13. Many reports say that the church is changing. I know that to be true here in Corpus Christi, principally in its presence and activity in the marketplace. Look around you. Get into the church and change with it. Be a part of the fulfillment of Psalm 110:1-3. We are the fruit of the seed planted by the first century church.

Denominations started as God poured out His Holy Spirit upon selected people and groups, resulting in a spiritual movement that was either rejected by those of previous outpourings or that refused to join those of the previous outpourings. The eventual result: more religious institutions that gradually lost their vitality, then declined and fell away from the truth, then [in some cases] rose up and returned to the truth.

If we go onward, we will begin tearing down strongholds [enemies of the cross, shallow commitment to Jesus Christ, failure of biblical family life, church disorder as measured by the New Testament pattern]. Without spiritual movement, the church cannot be steered, so the Lord is giving us life and the effects of His life so He can guide us. But let’s not talk too big too soon about fire in the church; fires do not need to be advertised and too much wind on a smoking twig will blow it out.

14. A reactionary is someone who takes a strong opposite position, knows it is weak, so comes out fighting even if ill-informed or off-base. To be a reactionary, one must have a dearly-held agenda even if it is only to oppose certain others. Reactionaries can be helpful because they cause their opponents to better prepare their thoughts and plans. Reactionaries are like testers in the church; they are valuable although they have few friends and get no reward in heaven for their ministry.

15. The New Testament mentions several gospels [items of God’s good news], two of which are the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of salvation. The gospel of the kingdom is about the world’s salvation [the present effect of the church on the world, to result in its fullest expression in the millennium], and the gospel of salvation is about personal salvation [the present effect of the rebirth on the individual, to result in its fullest expression after the millennium].

Anything of the gospel is a revelation of the grace of God to fallen and helpless man through a mediator, Jesus Christ. Our Creator has initiated a recovery process like a steel magnate sending his son into a junkyard to retrieve valuable parts for reconstruction of a building. The junkyard dog guarded his domain, bruising and tearing the son, but the assignment was accomplished and the parts were retrieved. The building is being rebuilt. It doesn’t yet appear to be what it will be, but it is showing promise of being something really great.

16. The first Adam’s wife, Eve, both narrowed and expanded her husband’s and God’s word – Genesis 3:1-7. She said that they should not even touch the forbidden item [narrowing God’s word] but then did find good reason to eat it [broadening God’s word]. The second Adam’s [Jesus] wife [the church] does the same thing. We find reasons to not even associate with sinners [narrowing God’s word] and to approve sinners’ sins [“Who are we to judge another?”]. Eve was an accurate living prophecy, was she not?

17. We can see God’s invisible attributes, His eternal power, and His divine nature simply from looking at His creation – Romans 1:20. We can see the fullness of Jesus in His church [ouch!] – Ephesians 4:11-16. We can see God’s story in the world’s history [His-story], not only in world history as recorded in the Bible. Those are good reasons to study nature, Jesus, and world history – three excellent sources for knowing God. And we have been given other good ways to learn of Him – Scripture, observing His miraculous workings, and by getting closer to Him.

18. Fellowship and followship are God-given needs. Leaders should model both before others do and more than any others should. The hope of those who follow is that their leaders have fellowship with peers and are still active followers.

19. Millions of people were in Abraham’s loins during his few years on earth. The Jews and Arabs would not have existed if not for Abraham’s faith in God. Likewise, my five sons, 18 grandchildren, and 9 great-grandchildren would have never existed had I died at age 2 from a ruptured appendix. They were in my loins.

Jesus believed that His Father would raise Him from the dead, so gave Himself over to be crucified. We who believe in [into] Jesus are bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh, co-heirs with Him. We were in Jesus’ spiritual loins as He went to the cross. We would not exist forever if not for Jesus’ faith in God His Father.

20. What is meant by “normal?” Certainly, normal does not mean average. A good example of normal is that condition of the church called “persecution.” If you will stretch your average with me, I will say that the normal condition of the church is to be persecuted. I can say that because I presume that the desire of Christians is to live godly in Christ Jesus –“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” – 2 Timothy 3:12. Normal Christians [but perhaps not average Christians] desire to live godly in Christ Jesus, so we endure whatever subsequent persecution. Our persecution may be small or major, both of which Jesus endured.

So, don’t encourage others to enlist in Jesus’ army for the pay, such as prosperity, vacation time, peace, and the like; but only to lose their lives in order to gain His – Matthew 16:24-25. The same goes for any relationship we have [church, work, driving our car in traffic, marriage, etc.]. If we are there for what we get out of it, we will wilt and run when tough times come.

Have you noticed that Jesus did not try to grow His ministry? He actually drove people away – the multitudes, the religious leaders, those who wanted to become His disciples, and even His disciples. He was looking for ripe fruit volunteers who knew what the cost of their enlistment was. They were able to leave at any time, and most did.

God’s perfect judgment was proven when He made the decision to 1) make the way of suffering the way toward godliness, and 2) choose you for salvation, part of which is the opportunity to suffer with Him. His perfect judgment shows best when our suffering is in the form of persecution for righteousness sake – Acts 5:41; Hebrews 11:24-29. Our brother Job was doing exceptionally well with the Lord, but did much better after his horrendous trials – Job 1:1-5; 42:1-6. And so will we – Hebrews 12:1-13.

21. The world is so confused and chaotic that anyone who can be focused and will organize a few people will win. The problem with Ishmael’s seed is that they will not focus on their common basics and are un-organizable – Genesis 16:11-12; 17:20. The same goes for the world [Satan’s seed], and for the worldly of the church. But the church has the benefit of having the seed of faith, being the seed of Abraham.

If we believers will become Jesus’ sheep we will be able to hear our Shepherd’s voice and follow Him into unity. Unity does not mean we need to put a common name on our church houses, or change our doctrines to agree with one another. Unity is a result of love, and it allows for many differences, even prefers differences.

That shows us a problem, which the Lord of the church seems to be sorting out these days. Some who are on the roles of His church are un-reborn and unregenerate. Some are reborn [John 1:12, “sons,” Greek “teknon,” meaning babes] but are still undisciplined lambs who need to be shepherded and disciplined so they can grow up into adult sheep [Romans 8:14, “sons,” Greek “huios,” meaning mature sons]. Lord, we need help.

22. If you want a home that will always stay clean, orderly, and quiet, go the way of Proverb 14:4. But if you want a home that is otherwise blessed, go the way of Psalm 127:3-5. Nancy and I had years of 127:3-5 and are now mostly in 14:4. There are times to enjoy both, thank God!

23. Opinion time: As the human Living Word of God, did Jesus of Nazareth live and die relying on the promises of His Father, or did He live and die relying on the nature and character of His Father? If you will, please, divide between those two positions [which on other occasions can also be united into one position] and give me a response.

While you are at it, what do you think caused the first death, in Genesis?

24. Evil exists [was therefore created by the Creator – Isaiah 45:7] and was ordained primarily to serve God’s purpose in Christ, just as civil governments are ordained of God to serve Him, although they are variably under the power of Satan. That should influence us, both in our internal wrestlings over our own evil, and with others’ evilness. Evil presents us with opportunities.

The French revolution was a revolution against God [as He had been represented to the masses]. The revolutionaries even changed the week from 7 days to 10 days, to avoid there being a traditional Sabbath. The change did not work. As the revolution failed, so did the calendar change fail.

Man, being made in God’s image and likeness, was given Scriptural earthly situations and practices to [mostly] unknowingly synchronize us with God, His nature, and His plans. God made His creation and its mechanics to be our silent ally.

25. Church, although the Lord may come for us at any time, let’s also be ready for a very long and costly “wait” in regards to a righteous solution to such as our same-sex civil marriages. During our wait, we must know and say what we believe, have sound convictions, take the associated flack, and stand on what we believe in [God’s word] more than what we think [opinions] .

26. If you think that your battles are growing bigger the longer you walk with the Lord, you are probably right. The Lord pointed that out to us, along with His encouraging answer as to why and how. It’s simply part of His process for growing us up. The more we grow in Him, the bigger our battles, the more we know that the battle is His, and that we contribute less and less to the battles. Actually, if we do well in today’s battles, tomorrow’s will be harder but not all will seem harder. His lesson in Mark 8:14-21 was that the less we have to work with, the more He will do. When we are weak, He is strong. When we are our weakest, He shows His strongest. Learning and living that truth develops a very righteous stronghold in us.

27. In the wilderness with God, Moses, Israel, the Amalekites, sand, snakes, and heat, things were perfect. Meaning that such was God’s perfectly customized situation of life for His people. Our wilderness of life now here on earth, and our smaller wildernesses that occur from time to time, are perfectly designed and orchestrated for each of us – no exceptions. Israel’s and our unbelief in the Lord, in His presence, and in His absolute care for us was and can be strung out or shortened according to our growth in trust and obedience.

The Lord endured much of Israel’s unbelief, but He did not tolerate certain things. Those things are very important for us to avoid – Hebrews 12, 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. Notice:

 1) God did not allow His people to turn back to Egypt. By the blood of slain lambs He had delivered them from bondage to the world, taking them through the baptismal waters of the Red Sea into a life that showed His constant presence and faithfulness, which some would not see due to their unbelief. They died in their wilderness, as some Christians die [slow down or stop walking with the Lord] in our wildernesses.

 2) God did not allow them to get away with rebellion. Rebellion is submitting to evil spiritual beings instead of to the Lord. When God’s people did that they died in their wilderness, as do we.

 3) God did not allow them to build strongholds in the wilderness. A stronghold was a fortress into which His people could retreat when the Amalekites came after them. They were sojourners in their wilderness, and Jehovah was to be their only protection. For us, strongholds are our self-made defenses for when [we think] the Lord is not or will not be with us in our battles.

 4) God did not allow them to remain in their wilderness beyond His scheduled time. When they had learned and changed sufficiently, He brought them out with a grand show, through the flooded Jordan River. The 2 ½ tribes that wanted to stay on the wilderness side of the river did not have the vision and desire for the fullness of God’s promises. That was punishable by death, which the other 9 ½ tribes were ready to mete out, but God’s grace intervened. Those who did not want to pass over into more fullness of life were of value to those who did press on, and still are valuable today to those who press on.

28. Strongholds are ideas and actions that we have built for defense of ourselves. Good strongholds are great, although the reason for their [temporary] existence is that we survive long enough for the Lord to become our stronghold. But our bad strongholds need to be torn down, not just cleaned out. We are greatly relieved once we clean them out, but unless the housecleaning is followed by the complete change of an infilling of the right stuff the cleaned-out spirit will come back with others of like ilk and our end-condition will be worse than before.

Under any label, the “I-gotta-be-me” stronghold is a major defense against the growth of Christ in us. It must go. Its replacement is Christ. Somehow, in God we have a necessary part to play in its departure. Humbling ourselves seems to be the route, even in regards to the good stuff that the Lord will build up within us.

In regards to our strongholds, it’s the laying down of our life that gets us out of the selective process of just which one to tear down first. That includes our supposed need to be right or to be shown right, even if “for others’ sake.” Jesus laid down His life without any public justification for His actions. He left that and its timing and its method to His Father.

The way up is down.

29. Another good definition of humility: “I don’t have all of the answers, therefore I need you.”

30. In Genesis, what was the first thing that made God unhappy? No, it was not that the serpent had entered the garden, or Eve’s deception, or Adam’s sin. It was 2:18. That there is a Trinity shows us that our one God is a unit. As Jesus prayed that His people would become a unit [John 17], so neither was it good for Adam to be alone. It was contrary to God’s nature, and Adam had been created in God’s nature. The church [body of Christ] being divided is contrary to Christ’s nature. Notice, too, that He did not create another man for Adam as a solution to His own created problem.

31. Here is a surprise. The world is in trouble again. This trouble has to do with the crisis of democracy in the European Union and the outreach of the crisis around the world. The EU’s move toward a one world government is causing troubles within and without the EU, and America is bucking the power move, at least as it applies to us. England is calling for a vote on whether to leave the EU due to this and other problems.

We are an independent nation that is governed by a constitution. A supranational government does not fit our shape. We, and some others, are resisting the threat to our national sovereignty. The offered web of international institutions that administer and enforce a body of international law is absolutely opposed to our identity and ideals. Our sovereignty rests in the people, and we have inalienable rights that have been given to us by our Creator. Our government does not have the right to transfer our sovereignty to any other organization, as the EU states have been doing to the EU.

You Bible believers have been watching for the coming movement toward a one world government, and it will come. Just because it will come does not mean we should not resist it, or any other evil that must come upon the world before the Lord returns. Things like the truth, loyalty to the Lord, kingdom living, and general faithfulness will not go out of style, although when He comes it appears that they will be very thin. What will be generally accepted is universal peace and prosperity through a global legal, political, financial, social, economic, religious, and military order such as is now being offered and established incrementally. It is and will be antidemocratic and anti-Christ.

So, my surprise was probably no surprise to you.

32. Most workplace ministers have settled the theological and linguistic gap between religion and business. And they are comfortable with wealth, success, profit, and acclaim. They are not awkward capitalists so can handle competition, profit-making, and socialistic challenges. They can see God’s truth and kingdom at work in human interactions of the marketplace.

That which is called “common grace” is common to all, whether applied to Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Jews, atheists, or anyone else. The “total depravity” of fallen humanity is salted with God’s common grace, a grasp on reason and understanding implanted in humanity that makes societies work. Workplace ministers see that God makes rain to fall upon the righteous and the unrighteous, even among the wicked. It shows as civic virtue, domesticity, natural love, basic human virtue, a public conscience, integrity, and loyalty. Thus, the workplace discovers truths and designs practices for the common good in the midst of the Lord’s favor being poured out on all human beings.

Christians are not the only ones who have the truth [meaning we do not have all of the truth to ourselves] about the practical concerns and challenges of life. That’s why I enjoy passing along to you many quotations from non-Christians and pitiful Christians.

33. “Genius without religion is only a lamp on the outer gate of a palace: it may serve to cast a gleam of light on those that are without, while the inhabitant sits in darkness.” – Hannah More [1745-1833], English Catholic, then Evangelical, abolitionist, educator, playwright, and poet.

34. Some things in life happen in a sneaky way don’t they. They happen so suddenly and right under our noses. For years, while I have been rejoicing over the Lord’s work in China, that process has been happening in India – ordinarily a place of chaos and confusion. It is reported that in six years [by 2022] the population of India will surpass that of China, and that in a decade or so India will have more Christians than China. China’s revival peaked in the 1990s but is still going. The things the Lord did in China He is now doing in India, with the percentage of Christians now reported to be 8 to 10 percent. There are hardships and struggles but the kingdom of God is advancing in extraordinary ways and entire communities are being transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

35. Isaiah [58:7] shared some of his understanding of God’s heart and mind when he wrote, “Divide your bread with the hungry, bring the homeless into the house; when you see the naked, cover him, and do not divert your eyes from your own flesh.” Let’s convert those words printed in ink on paper into life-giving action for the Lord’s and our and the poor’s sake. It lives well with, “He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God” – Proverb 14:31.

When you feel overwhelmed with the many needs of the needy who are always with us, remember a proverb from our Russian brothers and sisters: “If everyone gives a thread, the poor man will have a shirt.”

36. How do you place yourself under the active governance of the Holy Spirit? Do you assume that you are always or usually under His governance? Can you get out from under his governance? If so, how? Are you governed by the Holy Spirit in everything you think and do? Yes, He is always active in everything, but is He your authority, director, and accomplisher in everything? That’s central to my question.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit is our Helper, Counselor, Convicter, Comforter, and Teacher and that He is with us forever. The smaller we are to ourselves, the more He is to and for us. He is the one who tailors our crosswalk and guides the nails that hold us in place so that Life can flow out of us into the desert.

37. “Everything comes to him who hustles while he waits.” – Thomas Edison [1847-1941], American inventor, business man, probable atheist.

38. What is the Lord’s goal for us while we are still here in our present earth-bodies? Jesus told His disciples that theirs’ was to be perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect. Their and our bull’s eye is His perfection, our only target. God and all humans know that that goal is impossible for us, but because that did not bother Jesus of Nazareth as His target, and did not deter His giving us the same target, it should not bother us. We accept our Father’s perfection as our only goal and continue towards Him in His grace.

Even though we are all aiming at the same mark we remain very different, except for our increasingly similar character. We remain unique. Viva las diferencias!

39. “We live in a society exquisitely dependent on science and technology, in which hardly anyone knows anything about science and technology. – Carl Sagan, [1934-1996], American astronomer and Jewish agnostic. Christians live in a kingdom exquisitely dependent on the Holy Spirit, in which hardly anyone knows anything about the Holy Spirit. Why? Because God the Holy Spirit has the attitude and job of a servant. Compare Abraham’s servant who was sent back to the home country to find and return with a bride for Isaac, his master’s son. He is shown to be a perfect servant; unnamed, focusing on his master’s purposes and methods, possessing his master’s riches, seeking a bride for his master’s son, yet not being the focus of the story – Genesis 24. The Lord Holy Spirit does not want to come to the forefront, does not want to replace our Father and His Son, but wants to serve them as He works to find and bring Jesus’ bride to the Father, with all of the Father’s riches adorning her – Ephesians 4:1-16.

40. I have a high level of confidence that each of you [at least those to whom I e-mail these THOUGHTS] have been redeemed. You are Christ’s. In fact you have been placed within Him. You are completely and forever safe. Nothing or no one can change that, not even God. We have His word on that.

That means that you have been called by name [branded] and that you are His [God’s]. Your ransom has been paid by Christ’s blood on the cross. You did not escape jail, your debt was not canceled; it was paid in full, so there is no longer a claim to [warrant out on] you. You are out of jail, you have been emancipated [forever removed from the curse of the law] so your on-going sins and sinful attitudes no longer have the power to put you back in that jail or under the law. Where there is grace, there is no personal merit. You are off the slave market by virtue of His love for you. Those whom He has set free are free indeed and in fact.

As if that was not enough, you are released from all obligations to choose whom to serve. Where there is grace, there is no debt to the grace-giving One. You can join those who spit in Jesus’ face -- by going your own way. You can mess up your life of perfect freedom but you are not again subject to the law. Even more wonderful is that when you mess up and are repentant of your mess, you can admit your messiness to your Redeemer and He will forgive and cleanse you.

Originally, you had no rights whatsoever. Now you have been bought out of slavery, removed from any process that could return you to slavery, and set entirely free. What are you doing with such wonderful freedom? Where there is grace, the only response is love.

41. In departing, a word to all of us: Relax. There is no need to understand everything; there is no need to agree on everything; there is no need to be on top of every situation; there is no need to be in the fullness of faithfulness in everything; there is no need to be knowingly prepared for everything. Relax.

“Relax” is the first cousin of “keep your peace.” There is a God who controls all of the needs, and more than our needs. We are not in charge. That God is in charge. He understands everyone, is coordinating everything, is on top of every situation, is entirely faithful in everything, knows everything, and has His purpose in everything. He is with us, we who are of little faith in everything, and He has prepared us for everything. He, the Prince of Peace, is relaxed yet on active duty full-time. He is the Lord of all. Go with Him.