THOUGHTS OF NOVEMBER, 2014

1. Experience is a good teacher, whether for those who are in a certain, customized laboratory-of-life class for the first time or for repeaters. The usual process for learning is first a lecture [opportunities to learn from others’ experiences], then the laboratory [learn from hands-on personal experience]. It is such a time-tested process that I am hesitant to disagree with it [but not totally hesitant]. My hindsight reminds me that in school when I went from the lecture to the lab I usually had no idea what the lab was designed to show me. I had not grasped enough reality in the lecture, so the lab was only a mechanical process to “do” – not an application of truth, not a knowledge-based building block that would prepare me for the next lecture and be helpful for building my experience base in the next lab. In short, my mind did not embrace the lecture so did poorly grasping the lab. Such is life in school, life throughout, and in the kingdom.

So experience can be a tough teacher, it being in the hands of our deliberate, purposeful, loving and wise Father-Professor. It does seem that He reverses the process by giving some tests first, then the lessons, but that’s not true. He has always [potentially] prepared us by exposing us to others’ experiences, whether by speaking by His Holy Spirit, through biblical teachings, by parents’ examples and teachings, by simple insights offered in observation, or by His offers to adjust our attitudes. If those do not work for us, we enter His lab unprepared for hands-on experience, perhaps thinking ill of the Teacher and of His educational process in general: “Life is just not good. Nothing seems to work for me!”

However, not to fret! There is yet a final examination that Christians can look forward to with true hope and great anticipation. Remember how we hoped to bring up our grades by doing well on the final exam? By our heavenly final exam we can bring our grade up to “passing,” possibly even to “Well done, good and faithful servant.” This final exam is called the judgment seat of Christ. During that exam every good and bad [if not repented of and forgiven] factor of our earth life will be placed before the Teacher and “me,” without spin and without anything hidden or misunderstood. That means if I got the short stick on earth in my family, on the job, in my marriage, in school, and anywhere, all will be considered – there will be perfect justice. How I did with that which I had to work [including God’s grace] will decide my final grade. Don’t forget that that grade has nothing to do with going to heaven vs. hell, but with our personal rewards during the age to come [the millennium].

If we stay confessed-up we will be ready for “Well done, faithful one. Enter into my glory.” That has nothing to do with having committed many and bad sins, but with being sensitive to the Convictor, the Holy Spirit, who removes every blemish we put on our white robe of Jesus’ righteousness when we repent. He can keep us spotless; ready for our final exam and grand entrance. Live ready.

2. “The two most important days of our lives were the day we were born, and the day we discover why.” – Mark Twain [1815-1910], American author, humorist, Mississippi riverboat pilot, Christian in the tradition of the Presbyterian branch. Spend some time thinking about why you were born. There are many accurate answers and at least some involved people to be thankful for.

3. Today, in this Thought, I’m sure that everyone will have one of their top desires fulfilled. We now have a list of the empires of the Near East and adjacent areas [time margins very variable over the thousands of years]:

1918 A.D. [post-World War I] until today, and continuing – per your present map.

Mid 1500 A.D. until 1918 A.D. – Ottoman Empire.

930 A.D. until mid-1500 A.D. – Turks and Mongol Empires.

633 A.D. until 930 A.D. – Arab Islamic Caliphate.

363 A.D. until 633 A.D. – Byzantine and Sasanian Empires.

68 B.C. until 363 A.D. – Roman Empire.

332 B.C. until 68 B.C. – Greek Empire.

539 B.C. until 332 B.C. – [Medo-]Persian Empire.

606 B.C. until 539 B.C. – Babylonian Empire.

2600 B.C. until 606 B.C. – Various Assyrian Empires.

Some dates of empires overlap due to existence of 2 empires, but you can get a picture of the work of man [and the concealed work of God] during those 4,600 years of continuous conflict and conquests. During that time God’s people had no vast empire. Even when they were doing well as an earthly nation they did not enlarge their borders beyond those granted them by the One who owned all of the earth. By promise He had given them a small piece of land and they were satisfied with their gift. Their mindset was that the world could fight over the world, but they were [and are] satisfied with their small part. In fact, they had difficulty hold onto that which they had, with those empires swirling about and through them. When they were in right relationship with Jehovah they were safe in their/His land, despite those empires, because it was their God’s pleasure to give His little flock that Promised Land Kingdom. When they drifted away from their God they were easy prey.

There is a lesson there.

4. When serious Western Christians [meaning those of our family who have had little or no real persecution compared to our siblings in the East] read 2 Timothy 3:12 we can be tempted to think the Bible must be wrong! True, we have had no persecutions of the sort and degree that many millions of other Christians have had and are having. But there are factors that influence our experience of persecutions. One is that we may not be living “godly lives” of the sort Paul and the Holy Spirit meant in that verse; that the Lord has been offering us where we are. Also, our lot in life is different from those in the East according to culture, time and place.

But persecution does come into our lives, whether we are Christians or not. We may think our persecutors are randomly selecting us, or that we brought it upon ourselves, or be able to see that there is a pattern to our miseries. Consider, in any case, that persecutions are inevitable and necessary. Here are some helpful verses:

1) Matthew 13 – The parable of the sower.

2) John 16:33 – Peace in our tribulations.

3) Acts 14:22 – Tribulation is a necessary part of our Christian life.

4) Romans 5:1-5 – The reason explained as to why we are so happy during our tribulations.

5) 1 Peter 4:12-13 – Our tribulations will be more than worth the grief.

5. The Lord brings up or takes down all authority – Dan. 4:25, 32, 35; Rom. 13:1-7. He tells us to relate properly therefore to all authority. Those are not just righteous authorities He is talking about. Daniel was relating properly to King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian Empire and Paul to the Roman Empire – neither very righteous empires. Would not it be helpful if we knew why He raises up the righteous on one occasion and raises up the perverted on other occasions. Since He chooses them and raises them up [or brings them down] He must know more than we know about the times and people involved – past, present and future. We need God’s understanding of things and people in the political arena, no matter which side of issues we and they are on.

6. “It’s better to walk alone than with a crowd going in the wrong direction.” – Diane Grant, living Canadian playwright.

7. “It’s not the mountains we conquer, but ourselves.” – Edmund Hillary [1919-2008], New Zealand mountaineer, conqueror of Mount Everett [with Nepalese Sherpa Tenzing Norgay].

8. According to Revelation 21, the earth’s surface and atmosphere will be totally changed. These present conditions, which have been necessary for our present mortal bodies, will pass away. Why? Because they will be needed no longer. There will be no necessity for oxygen to sustain us. We will have our new bodies that had already moved through vacuum-space as we returned to earth from heaven with Jesus. The New Jerusalem will sit upon a new earth’s surface in a new atmosphere [or non-atmosphere]. We won’t need sunlight for animal and plant life, so we won’t have it. Jesus will be its and our lamp.

Along with all of those supernatural changes of things formerly natural, there will be tremendous things going on with us humans, who will have spiritual human forms. [Already we are spiritual beings but are bound into our human forms.] For one, we will not be sad. I understand that to mean and/or: 1) There will be nothing at that time to make us sad [probably]. 2) We will have no memory of past sadnesses [unlikely], 3) We will see the past through God’s eyes, such as seeing that all things had worked for good for those who loved God and were His called; that His wrath was just, loving and wise; and that He had mercy on those whom He desired and hardened those whom He desired [likely]. Everything will make sense to us, as it did to Jesus and always has to God.

9. Some promises made to us by the Lord, and His tasks given to us, are not given to us for our completion. Compare Jesus, who came to create the church. He was promised the church and tasked with the job of creating it, but did not see it [except by eyes of faith] during His earthly lifetime. God’s word in many of its promises is a generation-to-generation word. As the kingdom increases, so will God’s word – without end. In fact, the bulk of the promises made to us individually and corporately may be planned to come forth through our spiritual descendants. Nothing is wrong with that, is there? That’s a kingdom mindset and was shown by Jesus. He seemed to be perfectly satisfied with and confident of that “delayed” process. In fact, He had ample opportunity to speed up the process and to see the “fulfillment” of the promise of being the head of His earthly kingdom during His earthly lifetime – Luke 4:5-8.

If that paragraph speaks to you, what should you do about it? That can be answered whether our spiritual children are our natural children or not. Just as we make plans to pass our earthly possessions to others, we can also pass our spiritual possessions [promises, ministries, talents, responsibilities, properties] to others so that those things can move forward with or without us. For example, Jesus gave us His ministry of the word [Ephesians 4:7-16] for the continuance of the promises of the ministry of His word. He “saw” within the church those who would fulfill His promises, ministries, talents, and responsibilities so He passed on to us those properties.

Then the encouragements began. Through a permanent and personal relationship with Him, He purposely built [and continues building] us up in Him. He lets us know Him, gives us necessary tests to fail and succeed, and adjusts our souls, minds and hearts to learn and benefit through those opportunities. As He did, we are to do likewise.

That is big-time responsibility. If you think you are just coasting out of this life, review that thought. All that the Lord promised you and commissioned you to do is neither perfected nor fulfilled. We have enough to occupy us until our departure. Follow Jesus.

10. “Work, work, work! Give, give, give! That’s all I hear from that church!” Have you been caught in that mindset? As pastors, do you hear that complaint? It may be so subdued that you have to “feel” it. You can see a mis-focus there. That mis-focus is on the church, not on the Lord who is Head of the church. If the Head was its focus, any complaint would have to be something like, “God is requiring too much of me/us. He is pushing for our everything! He wants all of me and mine. He even wants me to love my neighbors as much and often as I love myself.” Right. We need to fire-off our complaints more accurately.

From the saved, He wants exactly that, our all, including our accurately aimed complaints so we can deal directly with Him and He with us. From the unsaved, He wants you, not your works. The saved do good works because they are saved; the unsaved do good works thinking to earn salvation [or peace, or some other feel-good that masquerades as our greatest need -- salvation]. Preachers, preach Jesus.

11. J. H. says that as we get older [and hopefully wiser – ed.], we get simpler. Others point out that there are not many elders among the elderly, although the numbers of elders continue increasing. True elders, whether officially recognized or not, find it easy to give themselves and their attention to others.

I have often taught my life-study groups that when someone opens a topic it should be pursued by at least 3 others before changing the topic. My usual example goes like this: Person A – “I bought a new dress today.” Person B – “I bought one last week.” Person C – “I found a good sale on dresses yesterday.” What is lost in that exchange? Answer: Love. What is gained in that exchange? Answer: Self-centeredness. Persons B and C were not at all interested in Person A, nor C in B. That’s sub-teen talk and it is found running freely in most adult casual conversations. It says, in blunt terms, “You shut up! We’re going to talk about me. I’m more important and interesting to me than you are.”

It has also been pointed out that wisdom does not need many words. Persuasion and self-centeredness do require lots of words, as I’m sure you have also noticed, and wisdom is not entertaining. Also, the wisdom of elders is patient with the immaturity of youngers.

12. “What goes around, comes around” is a simple way of saying “Do unto others as you want others to do unto you,” and “Give and it shall be given to you.” That’s another example of Scripture being worked into our culture, called “Christianization.” Flora Edwards, American author, put those verses this way: “In helping others, we shall help ourselves, for whatever good we give out completes the circle and comes back to us.”

`13. G. M. shares with us a conversation he had with the Lord: “Lord, what part of Your body am I? Am I a foot, a hand, an eye, a tongue …? ‘No!’ He said. The mental picture of Jesus came closer to me and a voice spoke to my spirit, ‘I want you to be the wound in my side.’

“I was shocked. I had a few ideas of what that might mean, but it was not too clear. Now, today, as I am sharing these memories with you, I think I begin to understand. Jesus’ heart was pierced by a Roman sword, but that symbolized a hostile world intent on destroying Him. In a similar analogy, we are exposed to the piercing thrusts of spiritual forces that would seek to destroy our witness in the world. But see, from the wound in Jesus’ side, a flow of blood and water, the source of life, redemption, healing, and cleansing. So also from our wounds will come a new source of life and witness, often greater than we have known before.

“If I have anything of enduring value to leave with you, it is this. From my experience, I can confidently declare that God is greater than any circumstances. Reverses, loss, pain, heartache, they are all part of living in a sin-cursed world. God has never promised us that there would be no pain. He has promised to walk with us through the difficulties, strengthen us when we feel weak, and purify us through the experience. And, if you look for it, on the other side of the pain is an open door of blessing that would never have come had you not come through the hurt.”

Thank you, G. M.

14. All of you kids out there [anyone under 80] don’t know what you are missing. Be patient and most of you will find out that life gets only better by the year. The bothersome stuff dribbles away somewhere along the way, leaving peace and hopefulness in its place. Life becomes more enjoyable and productive.

For example, every night when we go to bed Nancy places her head on my shoulder and we cuddle. We pat and caress and thank the Lord for the tremendous life He has immersed us into, and for the day just then ending. Our hearts are full of joy unspeakable. It’s difficult for us to remember all that we want to praise and thank Him for, but we make a go at it. Our asking Him to do things are gradually fading away into thanking Him for having done them or for having done them in advance of their completion. He has been so good to us, our family, our friends, our church family, and to strangers with whom He crossed our lives -- that more and more of our first-said prayers for you are ones of thanksgiving.

15. “Men stumble over pebbles, never over mountains.” – H. Emilie Cady [1848-1941], American author, homeopathic physician, one-room school house teacher, member of Unity church.

Let me point to 4 pebbles of poor economics that add up to a mountain of financial lose. 1) For various reasons, many of us live from payday to payday, saving nothing for the future [rainy day, retirement, someone’s sudden need, etc.]. 2) Many buy items on time instead of paying cash, incurring interest fees. 3) Almost all of us use credit cards [fine], but not many pay them off every month [un-fine], thus incurring credit card debt [interest and penalties]. 4) Some “hock” their next paycheck at the Money Store for a percentage of its face value, thus losing more money.

There are more ways to diminish the value of one’s paycheck, adding up to a valley of income and a mountain of loss.

If someone added up the above type of your financial costs/losses, how much would you be paying for not saving enough to pay cash? And that list does not include unwise investments.

16. A recently uttered prayer after the speaker had given testimony went: “Lord, you gave me your life and these words. I have given both to these whom you gathered here today. I gave them your words, but I cannot bring them to faith. Send your Holy Spirit to do that, for your sake. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen.

17. The “religion-neutral” political systems of the world have become very religious; so much so that in the United States we have a very religious and very dictatorial religious political system. Whereas for generations the church had been the conscience of the political system, the political system has now become its often un-Christian conscience.

You historians will recall from the record that Nero persecuted and killed Christians because of their supposed “hatred against mankind.” Although Rome’s Christians fed the hungry, housed the homeless, buried those found dead in the streets, and took in the unwanted newborn who had been found thrown in the streets to die, their new, strange and independent form of worshipping and obeying an invisible god who had come back from the dead and was alive brought them into conflict with the moral relativism of those days. They faced that dominant state religion [moral relativism] just like the church faces it today.

Our culture has been so propagandized that the church is no longer a buffer between the public [of any religion] and the civil government – especially the national government. Our Supreme Court has decreed that the church’s opposition to moral relativism means we are enemies to the human race.

[This comes as nothing new to those who have been watching over the past 60 years or so. The same thing has happened to the Jews for 2,000 [3,500] years. Again we read and hear in the news that Israel should have no right to exist, as a nation or religion. The world is again being propagandized. The memory of Israel’s holocost in World War II has faded and is being denied. New mini-holocosts are regularly occurring against the Jews.]

The crime of Christians is our creeds. Nero [and other civil governments] could not tolerate beliefs in a god other than him or his government. That, and our obedience to our God god, was and is intolerable despite the peacefulness and helpfulness of the church.

Today our beliefs are the cause of our persecution, especially when we speak and live our beliefs. I suppose it can be said that, because the church has chosen to be divided among itself by our different beliefs, civil government is making no worse use of our beliefs by persecuting us because of them, than we of the church do to ourselves. There must be a lesson there that we need to hear, if we can.

If it were not for the bankruptcy of truth in the church, the world would be much more straightened out because “One word of truth outweighs the world.” – Alexander Solzhenitsyn [1918-2008], Russian novelist, historian, critic of Russian totalitarianism, 1970 recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, and reported to be of variable Christian faithfulness. Yes; lots of darkness, but one small light pierces especially the more dense darkness. It is getting darker in the world, thus giving the “dimmest” among us more and better opportunity for victory. Light up! Live up! Step up! Speak up!

18. If we have been grasped by the truth of God’s absolute All-Mightiness -- He being the Master Architect of all that touches our lives, that He loves us enough to have died for anything and everything we ever did that requires punishment, and that He is aware and in control of every cell and detail of our bodies and lives – the more peace we have, the easier it is to be faithful, and the more pleased He is with us, His precious createds.

19. Aristotle Onassis [1906-1975], very successful Greek shipping magnate, reminded listeners that one’s business success was founded upon knowing something that others did not know. For our use, that principle is enlarged to, “The Christian missionary’s success is founded upon knowing Someone whom others do not know.” To know Jesus is to be so intimately united with Him that He may reproduce Himself in and through us. That means more than being born again [born of the Spirit, at which event He places His Holy Spirit within us]; it means that we live closely with Him so that we are continually being more conformed to His image.

20. Our imagination is vital. In it we store and grasp things that are not within the current material experience of our 5 senses – touch, taste, vision, hearing and smelling. Our imagination allows us to enjoy [or not enjoy] things from our memory or from our future, including those things that we have not experienced, are not experiencing, and may never experience in this earth-life. Imagination can be of junky things permanently fictitious or things real of the past, present or future. Imagination makes those things [people, events, etc.] real in and to us, so that they change us, or are brought about.

We become inventive by being imaginative. If it is the Lord who is feeding our imagination [through sermons, Bible reading, testimony, prayer, meditations, etc.] our imaginations [faith] bring things to pass according to those imaginations. In short, faith is rooted in the place in our souls called imagination so that we may be God’s fruitful garden.

We have not touched, tasted, seen, heard or smelled those things that the Lord has prepared for us who love God, but when He reveals them to us by the indwelling Spirit through lively, submitted imaginations our imaginations become and produce substance, evidence and expectations. Our spiritual walk and resulting testimony depends upon our having a lively imagination – Is. 64:4; 1 Cor. 2:9-13; Heb. 11:1-2.

Leo Rosten [1908-1997], Russian-American teacher and writer, noted that courage is the capacity to confront what can be imagined. That’s solid! FYE, he also said that we see things as we are, not as they are.

With all of that said, remember that our imaginations [as all else] must be guided by the Spirit and be self-controlled.

21. In Matthew 10:32 Jesus spoke of our confessing Him before others, adding that in turn He would do the same for us before His Father. That is superb, is it not!! Then, in verse 33, He added the other side of the coin. I leave that verse for you to read [and to shudder, as does the devil when he reads it].

So what is it to confess Him before others? Consider: 1) When [not”if”] our trials get overwhelming – fear, confusion, loneliness, pain, self-doubt – but we rest on our crosses; 2) When [not “if”] we have been disobedient -- perhaps even “reprobate-ic” -- we repent and submit ourselves to the Lord and to appropriate saints for restoration, and 3) When [not “if”] we live in economic distress -- tempted to worry, fear, panic, and stop being generous -- but confess Jesus as our provider by sharing with others.

Those three confessions are enough for me to handle at this setting, with Thanksgiving Time being this very day. I offer them to you, for whom I am thankful.