THOUGHTS OF NOVEMBER, 2017

1. It is interesting to read that evolutionary scientists who adhere to the Big Bang theory say that the universe should have annihilated itself as soon as it came into existence. They argue that only energy existed in the beginning then, as the universe expanded, some of the energy transformed into matter. That sounds reasonable to this humble Science 101 student, so perhaps that theory could have been part of the Lord’s process. When He does something, it is impossible. Then He sustains the impossible until it has completed its purpose. That includes us and that which He does specially for and in us.

Brian Miller, research coordinator for The Discovery Institute’s Center for Science and Culture, says, “The fact that all the details are just right for life when almost all other set of laws of physics would have produced a universe that couldn’t support life strongly suggests that there is a creator who designed those laws specifically with life in mind.” Good thought.

1. It might happen sometime that things just don’t go smoothly, or don’t go at all, or they go backward. If that ever happens to you, consider that the Lord is running everything, no matter who or what He is using as His tools. As Job, God’s servant, knew that the devil was only a tool of God, so should we, God’s children, also know. Satan will ruin our plans, buffet us about, kill us, etc., but by staying close to the Lord in all of it we will come through in victory even though it might be a very expensive process in the natural. Live the forever [time-wise] and eternal [quality-wise] view.

It is reasonable, therefore, to ask, “Why would the Lord resist us, His own people, who are committed to serving Him?” It is a reasonable question because it shows that we have laid aside the automatic assumption that the All-mighty God, creator of the universe, would never resist us, especially “ME.” So why does He resist us, the chosen ones, those who have been granted the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, we who are committed to righteousness and are headed for eternal glory with Him forever? The reason is that He loves us.

Let’s borrow some poetic beauty from Sonnet 43: “How do I love you? Let me count the ways:” 1) You will not be strong unless you encounter My wisely prescribed opposition, including during the best of your times. Resistance training is necessary, and is appreciated only by those who know what is going on. 2) You are off the track, so need my perfectly tailored correction. Don’t buck. My resistance is insurmountable. 3) You were about to go through the wrong door. I closed and locked it. Sit over there and listen for Me. And don’t measure the time. 4) You were deliciously fruitful, and I know how to get more of the same from you [John 15:2]. Check with your brothers who are on the Way with you; they see it better and will help you understand. 5) You need to listen more closely to Me. Too much of your time and effort has been expended on things that, and people to whom, I have not called you. I will teach you to fear me, which will increase your productivity. You will be delighted with the results.

So, don’t attribute your difficulties to the devil, to people, to the environment, and to “just the way life goes” – failing to recognize the Lord’s absolute hand in and over all of it. Life makes more sense than we sometimes think it does.

1. When you feel threatened in your position of authority [as opposed to simply finding yourself opposed], consider that you have a World Kingdom view of yourself, not God’s Kingdom view. Recognizing, repenting, and getting in step with the Lord are the first three steps to handling the problem. Those three steps give us a running start. Notice that all three steps deal with the big “ME” where no one can hinder the Lord’s action in us.
2. What is the Christian’s political-religious position and responsibility? Are we to be the new Socrates, the presenters of our understandable religion to the world? Wouldn’t that help to establish more of the Kingdom of God on earth? If the state could see the benefit of the church, and the church see the benefit of the state, would not that be wonderful? If the two could see mutual benefits, what would prevent a golden age of church and empire? [That’s not a new thought, and it has had many activists.] Cannot faith and reason harmonize? Must both remain under separate and often opposing governance? Why do some say that these questions must be put aside until the millennial reign of Christ Jesus [and us – Rev. 3:21] on earth?

I am not going to answer any of those questions for you. They have been around since the garden. If you don’t know the answers, you can write to me by slo-mail using a fake name and a neighbor’s return address.

1. Are you ready to become one of the undefeatables? That [actually, “He”] is available for that purpose. There is an open-to-every-believer call of death-to-self that some hear; then comes a variable and limited-time hindering allure of the world, the flesh, and the devil; then the emergence of a remnant; and then an undefeatable few. Joseph, David and Daniel were some of God’s Old Testament servant-undefeatables. Since the coming of Jesus Messiah and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, there have been many of God’s family-undefeatables.

It is God’s purpose and on-going activity to increase Jesus Christ in every aspect of creation until He fills it all. That includes all of residual humanity at some final stage of our process. When we get a glimpse of Him and that process, the battle within starts. Do we want to serve Him in our own way, in our own tradition, on our own schedule and convenience, or do we agree to die to all of that and embrace Him? Embracing Him leads to submitting to Him, cooperating with Him, a smooth harmony of life in Him, and an order of life that is obvious to [some] others. His will in that person cannot be stopped and we will not be frustrated [which would be losing sight of God the architect and all-mighty].

While we are yet here in our flesh, there are times when we must re-set our understanding of God’s purpose, then move onward again. His purpose cannot be stopped but does require some re-adjustments on our part. His kingdom cannot be defeated, so neither can one of His undefeatable ones along the way. There are times when the Lord will single us out before that aforementioned world, flesh, and devil but only for the purpose of our [perhaps] betterment in this life and [definite] betterment in the life to come. Remember that when Job was singled out, he gained in both this and the next life. But don’t fall for the this-life prosperity gospel.

The Lord has been forming a remnant of undefeatables who know they have been crucified with Him and have decided that they will no longer live for themselves. He stayed in the docket and on the cross so we could become God’s wisdom, be God’s righteousness, receive God’s sanctification, and be God’s redeemed ones. Perhaps another word for them is “overcomers.” As the song says at its end: “And I mean to be one, too!”

1. There is significant difference between receiving spiritual gifts and being spiritually fruitful. Gifts can come without any qualification other than the Holy Giver wanting to give. He, the Holy Spirit, came from our Father at the behest of His Son, Jesus. He came bearing gifts for the one church, which He placed in its many individuals.

Bearing fruit requires abiding long enough in and with the possessor of Life that we receive and keep the fruit in all of its stages, and remain abiding long enough for the fruit to ripen. Then we are available to others who harvest the Life-giving fruit for themselves.

Gifts are given; fruit are earned by abiding, but not in the manner of rewards [for particular actions] or salary [for a day or lifetime of work]. Pray and believe for spiritual gifts; take up and stay on your cross for your spiritual fruit.

1. What makes the gospel good news to us? Foremost, at least initially, is that our sins are forgiven. Halleluiah! Yet, to the sensitive man whose ongoing sins continue to weigh him down [because he has seen the purity and power of God], forgiveness of his sins is not enough. To him, there must be more to the good news, and there is! To be the best of good news there must also be transformation. To put it simply, to him the message of forgiveness without transformation is not good news. To forgive our past without transforming us in the present for our future violates his sense of moral sincerity. Intuitively, he knows that the Lord has no part in such a truncated plan.

The point here is that we must live, speak and preach to whole good news. To offer the sinner the gift of salvation based on the work of Christ on His cross, without informing him of Christ’s provision for ongoing righteousness, is to set him up for a living defeat and unbelief. Even the ongoing repentance and forgiveness, needed by all, is not sufficient. It does not replace the good news of God’s transforming grace in the soul of the believer. If it appears that conversion does not bring about transformation, it is likely that the word of Life offered the believer is not complete. The messenger needs to grasp the more full meaning of his message. We have a message of pardon and repentance unto righteousness. It is also a message of temperance, righteousness and godliness in this present world. The One who saves us from the results of our sins will also save us from sinning, through separation from the world, carrying our own crosses, and loyalty to our King unto death – all by grace and faith.

1. More on the previous Thought: The result of separation, carrying, and loyalty is the reduction of our SELF so that Christ in us may be revealed. A lifetime of self-effort cannot accomplish what the Lord can do in short order when we are on our personal crosses. When we cease our striving and meekly accept our cross in a matter, we have made another leap forward with “Christ in me, the hope of glory.”

He has chosen worldly weakness to shame the worldly strong – 1 Cor. 1:27. His power is granted to those who have become weak His way. In fact, His power is compatible with and works jointly with our weakness. All power other than His is fake and cannot overcome His power in His weak ones. That fake power looks real to this world, but is fake. It does not change the Lord’s plans nor slow them down. Weakness from yieldedness, and faithful suffering, results in conquered kingdoms, acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut mouths of lions, quenched fire, escapes from the sword, weaknesses made strong, mightiness in war, victory over armies, persecutions, and the gaining of God’s approval. To gain these things, we must first be weakened and emptied of Self.

Look around. The Lord has chosen the unlikely and the incapable because His kingdom is all about Him, not us. We don’t even need anyone to teach us – 1 John 2:27!! It is hard on my religious flesh when I say it, but that which the Lord has set up in the church [Eph. 4:11] is not needed. He who can raise up stones to praise Him [Luke 19:40] can raise up ministries. He is greater than His ministers.

1. The timing of everything is in the Lord’s hands. He is the all-mighty engineer. All is designed to be to His glory and to the eternal betterment of everyone involved – even remotely involved. By faith the most is made of everything and the least is made pleasing to the Lord. As our walk in the Spirit improves, we see that truth more clearly and consistently and immediately. That makes us beacons of Light in the world’s many dark places. Some of the Lord’s Lights burn briefly due to failures, and some due to martyrdom. To all who will listen to Him, He will whisper words like, “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary” – Gal. 6:9. Waiting is painful on the flesh, especially if “the horse is standing on my foot.” The horse standing on one’s foot means anything that is deeply touching us or our beloveds, and time is slowly passing.
2. Jesus tells us to not fear those who can do, and actually do, evil things to us, including kill us – Matt. 10:28-31. To make His point, He mentions His Father’s attention to the sparrows, who do not fall to the ground [die] without His knowing it. Our flesh is not well-satisfied with the limitation of that teaching. What we want is for our Father to keep us from being hurt or killed; it being insufficient that our Father only “knows” of it. If we are valuable to the Lord, why doesn’t He protect us!!! Well, on the full screen of this eternal and never-ending life process, dying this earth death is not as important as how we lived it, even briefly. It is our value to Him now that makes us valuable to Him forever. Knowing Him and His ways, and living His life His way makes us valuable. Knowing Him, serving Him, trusting Him – those are valuable to us forever. But our flesh still says, “I want to have my way. I want the Lord to take good care of me, and I want to define what is good.” Fear not; the Head of the church has handled every challenge for 2,000 years and He will handle the remaining. Stay available no matter the personal cost. That’s what He did.
3. When a church [denomination or congregation] gets into trouble with mammon [money or other of earth’s treasures], it usually looks into itself for a program to correct the problem. It may be a program supplied by the denomination, or by a professional church-helping organization, or by a program the congregation develops for itself. If you see that as a program in which the blind lead the blind, our minds are on a common course. A program from within the problem is headed for the ditch. It is better to go back to the drawing board, to the One who designed the church and brought it into existence, and offered to run it. That’s Jesus Christ.

Jesus brought the church to the point of birth, into the world of sin, with the religious and political powers stirred up in super anger and rebellion against Him and His disciples. Then He left them!!! It was a disaster in the making. It was an impossible situation; who could survive it! Only the Lord Himself could handle it, and He did. He designed it, only He can build it, only He can bring it to life, and only He can run, maintain, and correctly correct it.

The worldly church does not see itself in that perspective today. We have many ways to handle our problems. We have confidence that we who are sick can pull things together, diagnose ourselves, and cure our problems. So we who are spiritually sick set about intending to heal our spiritual sickness. You know the results, and you know the correct way to fix our problems. It starts with personal and corporate repentance, asking the Lord to show us exactly what and how bad our sickness is, meaning, “How did we get here?” That’s the process when a sick patient wants to get well. He goes to a doctor for diagnosis and treatment. When the diagnosis and treatment are correct, and the patient accepts them and completes the treatment, all is well. But the church, in its sickness, thinks it can diagnose and treat itself.

The church is not listening to corrective words of life. It trusts in Jesus’ promise that He would always be with us. We think that we are always doing well with Him and that He will always be with us as we work ourselves out of our problems. The truth is that He loves us and His always-presence is always guaranteed. It is true that His presence means He is watching, hearing, and working, even in the midst of our illnesses. It is true that His promises and presence mean He will act on our behalf; that He will fulfill His word. His word says that when we do good He will bless us spiritually [including with persecution for righteousness sake] and His word says that when we do bad He will chastise us [including with persecution for unrighteousness sake]. Both of those are examples of good things He does for us, but some of it is painful and even terminal because of our sin and unrepentance. That is part of what He meant when He said He would always be with us.

The church needs its Doctor. That’s the message of Revelation 3:14-22. That is our message in this Thought. We became lukewarm and went astray from God’s plan for us and for the church. We have attained to more and more of this world and less and less of Jesus’ kingdom. Some of us are being spewed out of His mouth. He is offering us white robes of righteousness to cover our nakedness [sin], and eye ointment to heal our spiritual blindness. We see no great need for more of Him [and less of us] because it is “our” church. Yet He stands at the door to our hearts and churches, asking to be re-invited in.

1. So, what is God’s plan of action for the church, when it is going well and when it is not? Like Jesus Christ its foundation, the church’s framework is found in Scripture, in the last things He said to us as He was leaving, about to re-ascend to heaven:
2. See first in Matthew 28:18-20. First is His absolute statement about His being the Absolute One, that He has ALL of the authority [power] in ALL of creation. Millennia ago Job knew that, lived by it, and was ready to die in it. If Christians, sons of God, possessors of the Holy Spirit, do not know that truth we are the most miserable of persons. Knowing His all-mightiness is essential for life, ministry and death. Knowing it, we are ready to go everywhere [after part B below], teaching everyone to do everything He taught His disciples, water baptizing converts, and disciplining them into the life of Christ. The church will then be pickers of ripe fruit, because observers will see the real thing and dive in, while those not prepared or chosen of our Father will not dare to add themselves to the church – Acts 5:12-16.
3. In Acts 1:4-8 the Lord said, “But hold on! Don’t start My commissioning process in the power of your best strength and intents. You need the Holy Spirit to do the job of diminishing you and bringing My power into and through you. Then you will not be trying to serve me in the strength and best intents of your flesh. I will start, build, maintain, and correct my church.” They did what He said and He did what He said. The church was off and going in the knowledge and power of God.

Many times since that beginning the church has gotten off course. The Lord of the church has always sent His word to heal us. When we listened and repented, He brought us back to church order, meaning He would again lead and build the church and we would again be good building material. An important point here is that He was always with the church, as promised, and that He was always working on behalf of the church, as promised. His “being with” and “working on behalf of” is meant to lift up and to bring down, to encourage and to chastise, to begin new things and to end others. He never forsook us, although if you are one of those who think He has forsaken us when we see things going “bad,” it may look that way – but that insight shows that we do not know Him and His ways. With that sort of understanding it is no surprise that we are off course. He is wise, loving, and faithful to His word and is getting our attention.

1. THE REPORT: Nancy had surgery to replace her cardiac valve on November 17th. When her surgeon came out to the waiting room to report to her family and friends, he had a great smile on his face. He had told us that the time of surgery was expected to be 1 to 2 hours. His post-op report was that it lasted only 30 minutes and went very smoothly. He had an element of surprise in his voice.

She was dismissed from the hospital on the 19th and has been up and around regaining her physical strength almost every daylight minute since, even watering her outside flowers front and back. She does rest. She has felt more rejuvenated daily.

When I brought her home, walking from the garage and through the kitchen, she could not simply pass the frig. She stopped, opened its door, and got things out for her to fix supper. Her doctors and I have limited her from any even nearly-strenuous work, but not from time up and about doing light things.

A wonderful thing occurred on the say of surgery. She wears hearing aids, which help her only somewhat. In the recovery room [for 24 or so hours] she could hear perfectly without them. In fact, voices and other sounds were painful to her hearing, so she asked for and they brought her some ear plugs. The next day her hearing was variable, and has been back to her normal hard-of-hearing since then. I will be asking her doctors if they have noticed such a thing before, considering that it may have been a side effect from one or more medications. If they have never experienced such before, I’ll simply conclude that the Lord had been close to her and instead of her face glowing for a time [like Moses’], she heard superbly for a time.

I have given Nancy to the Lord so many times, in some of which her doctors had her soon promoted to glory. Those times of gifting her back to the Lord, who first gave her to me 65 years ago, have been difficult on my flesh because I really meant what I said. Those were times of absolute honesty on my part. I told Him that I did not want Him to change anything for me in order for her to continue in this earth-life, that His plans are always perfect, and that if He took her I would still love and serve Him all of my life. For the sake of my expressing complete honesty, I would tack on [although He already knew it]: “But you know that I certainly would appreciate it if You left her with me longer.” Those were Garden of Gethsemane times.

1. You are in God’s hands. He is present and working in and around you for His glory and your eternal betterment. He said He would never leave nor forsake you. He will keep all of His promises toward you, even as it looks like you have been forsaken. He and you and we need the good and the “bad” times, the easy and the difficult, the “God is here!” times and the “Surely we are forsaken” times. But don’t be deceived by the appearances, either the good or the bad appearances. He is with us and is always working His perfect [and only] will. Hasta!