THOUGHTS of June, 2018

1. Planning is definitely good and godly but, in a different way, because we are born again we don’t have to plan our works for the Lord, and should not, except for our dedication to Him. Why? Because He has already planned our works for Him. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” – Eph. 2:10. The central focus for us in the matter of service to the Lord and man is believing that the Holy Spirit actually can and will lead “me,” then yielding to Him without reservation, then following [closely and behind] Him – Luke 9:23. He will teach us how to follow, meaning to recognize His active presence and that which He is doing, hear His voice, minimize ourselves, know when to slow down or stop, move quickly into a new area, or “get out of town” vs. meeting with the masses in the city square. The Book of Acts is loaded with examples of Holy Spirit acts of those “follow Me” sorts.
2. It is a challenge [which can be welcomed] but often an insult to the human mind when it hears that it is inadequate for God’s purposes and needs to be renewed – Eph. 4:23. Have you ever heard or thought, “Did not God give us a mind and expect us to use it!” Well, yes and no; He gave us a mind [which is greatly molded by worldly influences but freed and empowered to change when we are born again] and expects us to submit it to Him for its transformation into His level of thinking. All of our opinions, feelings, prejudices, points of view, world views, etc. not only need transformation, but radical transformation. Thus, the human mind resists and rebels at the suggestion of its inadequacy [dependency, weakness, limitness].

The way of the cross is God’s way for changing our thinking and feelings into His. We are children of God and as such we should show family mental traits. When we walk the cross walk, our thoughts begin to reflect His thoughts and our ways show His Life. Submitting our thoughts to Him results in His wisdom, ways, and will being done. Example: Our limited human [carnal, even for believers if we get suspended in an early stage of transformation] mind takes the “good news” that sinners can be made righteous in Christ and can escape the wrath to come [1 Thess. 1:10] and changes it to “cheap news” that we can be happy in Christ and escape the hassles of life. That message leaves them puzzled and powerless in times of trial.

1. Most of our reputations are intentional and deserved are they not, although some of them have developed from misunderstandings. They can be about individuals like, “That’s just like Betty!” They can be about groups like, “That’s thoroughly California!” In this case I have in mind the French national rail strike over the right to retire with full benefits at age 52. The strike started in April with 86% of trains canceled nationwide. The workers were already allowed to retire at age 62.

There are many thoughts and attitudes about retirement. Mine started with life on a family farm when “work” was as natural, good, productive, and necessary as was breathing. That was a good way to start, and it has been modified only a bit over my 88 years. As a doctor I practically never took off for vacations or holidays. The further I went with the Lord, the less I needed time away from His assignments. They, the work and persons, were life-giving to me. Work was filled with patients who were “family” whom I loved and who loved me [usually]. Why should I vacate or retire from that?!

Then came a day when I was 70 and became aware that the Lord wanted me to take a week off from work. My beloved partner and daughter-in-law, Dr. Terri Eckert, asked if I was well. I was. After the week off, I told her that I was going to take off another three weeks to make it a full month. At the end of the month off, I told her I was not coming back. That was the way I retired from practicing medicine. It was a grand surprise, but smooth transition for all of us.

During these following 18 years I have never had the desire to return to those wonderful labors. Yes, now 18 years retired and in good health – great health for an 88-year old. It has turned out that I have done about the same thing as those French railway workers are striking for – retirement with years of remaining life. Additionally, in a similar way, I have joined my fellow Americans who face $6 trillion in unfunded pension liabilities, although the Lord, who scheduled my retirement, has also miraculously funded my “private pension fund.” I can add to His reputation by saying, “That’s just like Jesus. That’s thoroughly the Lord.”

1. Do you get in a moral strain when someone wants to borrow [usually money] from you? To make my point, it may be an urgent need for a small amount of money for food, or for a large sum of money to start a business. The small request for food strikes us in a different spot than the large request for venturing into business, does it not? In both cases you may know the need to be a good or a bad one and that you want or don’t want to be involved in the request. You disciples recall that Jesus said to give to those who ask. That’s a very broad and challenging command, and the Lord allowed no exceptions.

Some years later the Spirit of Christ in Paul said to not give to those who will not work – 2 Thess. 3:10. That modification has helped disciples [like this one] considerably over the past 2,000 years. It especially slows the unwise spendthrift and prods the penurious. The remainders of us will have to ask the Lord when to or when not to give. Most of the time we will have to use our already biblically informed and spiritually sensitive minds that He has formed in us.

1. What/who is your most thought-occupying thing/person? Not “who should be,” but “who is?” There is real competition in that lineup. Usually, “me” is the answer, followed by such as spouse, family, work/job, recreation, and somewhere in the list is the Lord. The most important thing/person to us will be on our minds more than any other one thing/person. The “me” answer is sneaky because the reason for my work may be for “me,” not for family or the ABC Company or the Lord. And, I may think of my spouse or kids most of the time simply because they embarrassed “me” lately or they are in trouble. Yes, the “me” is a problem but have you noticed that the Lord has been improving that over the years?
2. We entered the kingdom of God through Jesus, the Gate. There was no other way we could have found or entered the kingdom; only through the Gate. We could have passed through religious practices and been told that now we were in, but we would have been deceived. Becoming a born-again Christian required the Lord putting of Himself, His Spirit [He being Spirit], into us. We could not have accomplished that on our own as humans. We can become a French citizen by going through a French citizenship process but without becoming a Frenchman at heart. We can become a member of a civic club by going through the club’s membership process, but without becoming a committed member. We can become a member of a religious organization by going through that religious organization’s membership process. But we cannot become a member of God’s kingdom simply by going through any process done by man.

Man’s contribution to the Lord’s membership process is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and live the gospel among the world, but only the Lord can select and rebirth humans into His kingdom. We continue going into all the world with the good news of Jesus, and He gives life to the chosen ones. Often, He gives life to the chosen ones even without them having seen a Christian [Jesus appears to them] or heard the gospel [from other than Him]. In any case, only Jesus saves us. He is the key to Life. He is the secret to Life. He is the method, formula and technique for Life. Because of and by Him we enter the kingdom.

But until the Lord puts a mark on those He has chosen so we may know who they are, let’s proclaim the message that stirs the vital response in the called unsaved: “Whosoever will to the Lord may come.”

1. William Tyndale [1494-1536] was an English theologian, Bible translator and scholar who taught a) the supreme authority of scripture [while the official church taught that the church was the supreme authority no matter what scripture said, and there were many discrepancies], b) Jesus Christ’s saving work and mediation as the sole basis of man’s salvation [while the official church taught that a right relationship to the church saved], c) salvation by grace alone [while the official church taught that good works, obedience to the church, and money given to the church saved souls], d) obedience to God’s laws [while the official church taught that obedience to the church was required, even when contrary to scripture], and e) more. He defied the official church and brought biblical truth to the masses. When his work on earth was done, the official church convicted him of heresy, strangled him to death, and burned his body at the stake.

Jesus of Nazareth [the Messiah, Son of God] strongly criticized the religious leaders for their setting aside of God’s commandments for the sake of their traditions, and was murdered. So was Tyndale. As a result of the labors of Tyndale and Jesus, God’s people were soon better off because they had God’s word and were without the organized religion’s self-exaltation and apostacy. It always will be so. Check yourself and what is being lived and taught around you. God’s word stands forever; all else is on sinking sand.

1. You know the story. Humanity was created in the image of God; not like God but as an image of God, not the real thing but a very similar image like a silhouette is. We were enough of an image that we were given rulership over all else of creation, the ability to be fruitful in our labors [our thoughts and actions had the power to create], and to multiply ourselves [to reproduce in body and soul]. That sounds great, but those of God’s image lacked one other attribute of God, a free will, so we got that, also. By misusing our free will we misused our rulership, our creativity, our fruitfulness, and our ability to create righteousness. Everything went to pot! And, so that we now being evil, could not return by our own efforts to the high level of fellowship and presence with God, He stationed a mighty angel with a flaming sword between us and the place of fellowship into God’s presence. Any effort to re-engage with God on that previous level would be met with rejection. Death would be the result if anyone pressed the issue too far. [Jesus did, and paid the necessary price for humanity’s re-entrance.] That is a summation of Genesis 1:26 through 3:24.

In Moses’ day, the Lord had Moses build an ark [a portable church house], in which the Lord would abide among His chosen people, the Israelites. They were to be the beginning of God’s restoring of that which had been lost in the Garden. To conceal the special presence of His abiding in the ark, He told Moses to make a curtain, and on it were to be the image of that cherubim with its flaming sword. That angel was still guarding God’s presence from His people. Only the high priest, and only after great preparation of his body and soul once yearly, could enter God’s apartment – Ex. 26:31.

When the work of Jesus had been done for us, the angel with his flaming sword [then in the temple] was removed – Mark 15:38. Halleluiah!! Now we have direct and bold access to the Lord and His grace – Rom. 8:31 [26-37]. There is no more separation or hindrance or delay. All barriers have been removed. When in times of need, even in our most pressing need [our greatest sin], don’t delay. Confess your sin while running to Him. The way of life while bearing our crosses may be difficult and narrow, but our way to the Lord is open and the flow of grace is abundant.

1. United Methodist Church’s D. U. “Your missionary, whither-so-ever the Lord Leads,” reports that the UMC has “decided they know better than God what our task should be.” They have changed the Great Commission. My Bible shows Jesus saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” D. U. says teaching, obedience, disciple making, and baptism have been replaced by a socio-political agenda of “seeking justice,” “serving others” instead of God, mere “proclamation,” and a vague hope of “knowing God.” I tried to research those specifics but could not. Perhaps you can.

No form of degradation in any segment of that which is generally called the church surprises me.

The true record, scripture, tells us that in the later times before Jesus returns there will be a simultaneous revival of the church and a falling away from Christ of that which is called the church. That condition is occurring at this time. The falling away is not reported very much because it is simply a further agreement of the church with the world. No longer is it newsworthy when the church says and does and lives the same as the world.

On the other hand, there is the revival. It is a quietly rising tide that is real and powerful and so far has been protected by the Lord through our culture’s ignorance of and blindness to things spiritual, and it is occurring mostly among “little” people. The religious and secular news organizations are not interested in God’s “little” people and the “foolish” things going on among us. Are you enjoying being little?

By the way, America now officially sends and receives 51,000 Christian missionaries, a clear sign that Christianity is the number one global religion and the only one in every nation on earth. Let’s encourage one another. The revival has only started.

1. Don’t let your circumstances define you; your responses are doing that job very well.
2. States have inspectors who travel about checking gasoline pumps for their accuracy. An honest measure must be given when we buy gasoline. Weights are held to the same standards. Some of us recall the “butcher’s thumb on the meat scale” warning. Honest weights and measures are essential. The purity of gold in rings is important for setting their value. Corrupt merchants must go out of business or pay a fine when caught. Standards are necessary.

When a civilization redefines its standards/values, it changes definitions of reality. For America and other Western Nations, this redefining has moved us away from the Lord’s created order and into chaos and corruption. We are doing that in matters of right and wrong, morality, life and death, male and female, marriage in various forms, abortion and life, and many other ways – all of the changes are false measures. The truth is being changed to fit our will. Make your stand on the Lord’s eternal absolutes. Watch for the incremental changes that can sneak up on us when we are not paying attention. Refuse to change the truth to any degree at all to fit your or anyone’s will. You who read these THOUGHTS can recognize the evil one and his same old tactics.

1. The firstfruits of crops were brought from the countryside to the temple in Jerusalem with great celebration, there to be offered up to the Lord by the priests. Some of the offerings were burned and some went to the priests and the poor. Those firstfruits stood for all of the rest of the harvest yet to be reaped, making the entire harvest holy. That day of presentation of firstfruits was called Shavuot, known to us in the Greek as Pentecost.

The firstfruits of Christ’s new life were also presented in Jerusalem, known to Christians as the first Pentecost. By the Holy Spirit, Jesus was presenting His 120 firstfruits – Acts 1:15. Those 120 firstfruits consecrated all of the rest of us over these 2,000 years. That 120 were our shown-forth guarantee that we of the remainder of the harvest are holy.

1. In case there is one of us who is wrestling with the Lord and has something not yet subdued, remember that Jacob wrestled with the Lord [who appeared to him in human form for a few nighttime hours]. He clung to Him until his hip was dislocated but got his requested blessing. The Lord can wrestle roughly when He wants to. Then the Lord changed Jacob’s name [“label”] to Israel, from “Cheat” to “Prince with God.” The nation Israel is still wrestling with “the Man” but will soon come to the end of their strength and lose, meaning win. But don’t we all wrestle with the Man, come to the end of our strength, and only then receive our blessings?
2. How could Jesus become our high priest of the New Covenant when the priesthood had not been properly [in God and according to God’s word] transferred to Him and He was not a descendent of Aaron? Would God “just do it,” another sovereign choice like Jacob [the second born] ruling over Esau [the first born], because “God can do whatever He wants?” The transfer was difficult [but simple for God]. Open your minds and let’s see what the Lord might show us.

The priesthood was very corrupt at the time of Jesus. If the high priest would not approve Jesus of Nazareth for the priesthood [and, if given the opportunity, he would not], who necessarily of a higher priest level could or would do it? God’s plan was for John the Baptist, born of the priestly lineage of Aaron, the only priest in the history of the priesthood whose birth was announced by an angel in the Temple, and pronounced by Jesus to be greater than any who had come before him [which made him greater than the then-current high priest] – Matt. 11:11; Luke 7:28. John the Baptist was God’s answer. John would fulfill that needed duty, the necessity of qualifying Jesus of Nazareth for the priesthood with and without lineage. John would become the “highest” priest so was qualified for the assignment. But first …

… The high priest’s ministry was to cleanse the people of their sins so they could have standing before God. That’s the priesthood that John the Baptist was exercising in the Jordan, without human authority or religious ordination, and [one reason] why Jesus persuaded John to baptize Him. Moses had washed Aaron to begin Aaron’s priesthood [Ex. 40:12], and although Jesus did not need washing in regards to any unrighteousness of His own, this was the passing of the priesthood that would give His future priests [that’s us] standing before God. So, there they were in the waters, the best of the old priesthood and the Best of the New Priesthood. And we priests have been cleansed, not only for our sakes, but for the sakes of others who need cleansing.

In order to remove sins, sinners presented an animal to the priest, placed their hands on the animal’s heads, confessed their sins to God in the hearing of the priest [thus officially transferring their spoken sins to the animal], the priest slew the animal, and the blood was poured around and on the altar. This was done daily, plus once annually by the high priest for the entire nation but on that annual occasion he presented the slain lamb’s blood to God behind the veil [hidden from Israel]. We know that Jesus was the Lamb of God, slain for us and for our sins, but when were our sins transferred to Him? Recall that on the occasion of His arrest the priests proclaimed Jesus’ “sins” [blasphemy, etc.] over Him, laid their hands on His head [slapped Him in the face] while still proclaiming His “sins,” and took personal responsibility for His death – Matt. 27:25. They spoke and acted for Israel and for all of the world, including for you and me.

Remember how the religious leaders seemed always to be asking John the Baptist and Jesus, “Who sent you?” They could not get beyond John and Jesus exercising their “priesthoods” while obviously not being one of their lot. Our lesson: Beware the leaven of religion, which is bread [the Bread of Life] that has leaven [institutionalized sin] in it. Everyone sins and everything has some degree of imperfection, but the leaven of the Pharisees was an institutionalized sin. That sin is hypocrisy, meaning false principles, or virtuous qualities proclaimed but not possessed. See Mark 8:11-21; Luke 12:1; Luke 13:18-21.

1. This Thought goes under the heading of “Is Jesus our example?”
2. What does it mean to us that Jesus was accused of not keeping the sabbath – John 9:16? God had told Moses that whoever did not keep the sabbath was to be put to death. Jesus always kept the laws that He had given the Jews, meaning He kept them the way He meant for them to be kept when He gave them through Moses – Ex. 20:10. Jesus did His daily-assigned work on the sabbath, also.
3. What does it mean to us that Jesus was accused of being a drunk – Matt. 11:19? The record clearly shows that Jesus made wine by the power of the Holy Spirit and commonly drank wine as a refreshment and fluid replacement. So?
4. What does it mean to us that He was accused of being a friend of sinners – Matt. 11:19? Are we a friend of sinners? Not just maintaining a kindly attitude toward sinners but have home-and-home friends who are sinners, meaning the unsaved and possibly unkempt, unshaved and unbathed.
5. What does it mean to us that Jesus was accused of hobnobbing with those accused of having contaminated God’s true religion? Have you worshipped the Lord while visiting another denomination lately, meaning various Protestants, Catholics, Mormons, etc.?
6. If Jesus did not tithe; what should that mean to us? The Old Testament law instructed God’s people to tithe, and the New Testament records show that tithing occurred in those days. As Jesus was free from the tithe, so are all of God’s children. But, as with all other “exemptions” [actually, God’s planned revelations of His real purposes], we are given a higher tithe – to be that 10% who are given to the Lord 100%.
7. Jesus mentored men, but He did not teach them to fast twice a week, which was the standard of the religious leaders, including John the Baptist and his disciples. What does that mean to us? For us, fasting is a way of life that helps us discipline our flesh so that we may more consistently walk in the Spirit.
8. Jesus had not attended any religious schools beyond the synagogue’s basic education. What does that mean to us? Is it necessary to be seminary-trained in order to fully exercise God’s ministry? Does your church require some extensive religious training before you can fully exercise a ministry given you by the Lord?
9. Jesus made much of His relationship with God, saying that God was His Father and that He had the power to forgive sins. In the minds of those around Him this made Him equal with God. What does that mean to us? Do you have the power and authority from God to forgive those who sin – John 20:22-23? As my vegetable farmer father’s son, I had the authority to loan or give vegetables, to forgive or exact payment, and to speak for him in many ways; and in more ways as I grew up. I was my father’s beloved son in whom he was well-pleased. It was normal for me to speak for him. So it is for us and our heavenly Father as we grow up. What does that mean to you?

All the while that Jesus was doing those unreligious things, He was healing the sick, raising the dead, walking on water, stilling storms, multiplying sack lunches into food for thousands, etc. What kind of mind would miss God’s real presence in those ways? One way to answer that question is to recognize that the Pharisees’ mindset distracted them from the simplicity of Christ. Be careful that you do not fit into the mindset of the “wisdom,” “traditions,” and “exalted attitude” of the Pharisees, which resist the testimony of Jesus.

In Acts 18, more of God’s religious leaders brought Paul before the Roman judge because Paul had “been persuading people to worship God differently than the law,” meaning differently than the way they interpreted their God-given religious laws. The heathen judge threw the case out of court [and what does that mean to us?]. Could there be a group among Christianity that continues to differentiate people on external rules and customs? Beware the wisdom of the Pharisees. We have a better and life-giving example – Jesus.

1. We in America may not recognize these opportunities very often. The story: Daniel, a high-level Israeli slave in Babylon, didn’t waver. When he heard that a murderous command had been given [Dan. 6:10], and knowing that the king could not and would not change it [v. 12], he stayed on his “disobedient” course and the Lord changed things. His stance was like Jesus’ determination as He headed for Jerusalem and His cross; like ours when we see the forces of hell arranged against us but don’t wilt; and like Queen Esther when she knew the likelihood of dying if she made the right decision, yet decided to do the right thing and said, “If I perish, I perish” -- Esther 4:16. In each case the lesson to be learned is that the best of eternity costs more than we have yet paid and that the Lord is allowing us to purchase our part of it, on the Lay-Away plan. It is the overcomers who will reign with Him – Rev. 3:21.
2. At the center of God’s purposes in this world is Israel. At the center of God’s purposes in Israel is Jerusalem. As said the prophets, Jerusalem is chaffing the nations. For no apparent earthly good reason, Jerusalem is upsetting the world. It is causing conflict, and the conflict gets worse the closer you are to it. The same goes for any nation or community or person. The closer we get to being at the center of God’s purposes, the more conflict we experience. It’s all spiritual, and it takes on the natural in various ways according to local factors.

As conflict begins to occur, we may back away from God’s purposes. That is unfortunate. It is a spiritually natural thing for us to suffer more when we are closer to the Lord and to His purposes for us. That is what is going on with our President Trump, and consequently with the United States. We are on course, which pleases the Lord and angers the devil. The closer we get to the Lord, the more we see by way of revelation, and the more we receive the sin of the world. That is part of being ambassadors of Christ. Remember how He did it.

1. I have found it! Here is an absolute: You cannot kill a dead man. That is definitely impossible. A great application of that truth is experienced when a believer who is dead to self is challenged by a situation that ordinarily causes fear or anger or some other self-centered response. The devil and his disciples find that they cannot kill a dead man. Once again they have to settle for failure, with some limited success in physical torment or circumstantial grief. It must be difficult, the devil’s job, but someone must do it otherwise the Lord would have no overcomers to reign with Him in Jerusalem.

As far as the dead man is concerned, being dead has freed him. He is now alive in Christ. True, it is an ongoing process [sanctification] but the taste of resurrection life encourages us to continue on the resurrection way. Instead of being afraid to die, we are afraid to go back to living for ourselves. Daily carrying our crosses gets the job done. We die to ourselves daily and the strength and consistency of Christ in us increases daily.

1. Jesus was apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. It can be understood that those “offices” were and are manifestations of His own Self as the Eternal Word of God. They are often referred to as His gifts of Himself, the Head of the church, the ongoing living ministry of Christ within and to the church – Eph. 4:7-11. And why did He give Himself in those ways? Answer: So He, continuing in us His earthly functions, could continue equipping the church for the work He called us to, so that the church would not lack Him in the building process – v. 12. After all, He did say that He would build His church.

And what would be the time limit for Him giving Himself to the church in those ways? His answer: “… until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” – v. 13. And the grand results? Read v. 14-16 and rejoice over His plans for His church, or weep over our present otherwise condition. We have not attained to those plans, so it is not He who has withdrawn those gifts from us. The conclusion can only be that they are still needed and being offered. Yes, they are still functioning mightily around us among little people.

1. We, the church, seem to always be looking for better methods for doing “things Church” than those provided by the Manufacturer in His Handbook. Almost any method will do, as long as it will not cost too much, will hopefully accomplish something that shows, and will not mess too much with our personal lives and pocketbooks. On the other hand, the invisible Lord is walking among the churches [Rev. 1:12-20] making a people whom He calls disciples. Church without discipleship results in churchianity without the livingness of Christ.

It seems that we will accept any method for hopefully increasing the church in numbers and dollars as long as we don’t have to become disciples. Disciples making disciples is the Lord’s method – Matt. 28:18-20. The devil has a counterfeit for almost everything. It is hard for us to grant Christ the preeminence when we have so many gods – money and other [good] earthly possessions, [good] earthly thinking and living, a responsible “me and mine first” mindset, and the “I am as good as I need or want to be” attitude among [good] church people. To counter those responses to His call to discipleship, Jesus simply said, “You cannot serve two masters.”

What is a disciple of Jesus? A disciple is one who submits his/her life and its contents to the Lord Jesus, to be made like Jesus, by the trustworthy Holy Spirit, according to His infallible Word.

1. Let’s talk repentance. Today’s picture by examples:

1). We are like a little boy, all dressed us for church, playing in a mud puddle. He is having a good time without knowing he is grieving his mother, until she sees him and the mess he has made of his “life.” Imagine him crying while she “brings him to conviction,” cleans him, and redressed him. That’s us. That’s the cleansing process of 1 John 1:9.

2) When one of my sons was in his mid-teens he had an automobile wreck. It was obviously his fault, and at that time he had a real attitude about the wreck and life itself. He had to appear before the judge because of the wreck but I knew that I had to stand there with him because of my son’s attitude. When the judge asked how he pleaded, I asked permission to speak and the judge permitted it. To the judge I said, “Judge, he is guilty of the wreck and I am guilty of forming his attitude. For years I was a bad father. We don’t have any defense.” The judge hesitated a few seconds, then said, “Case dismissed.” That’s Jesus at work.

3) An adult grandson was to appear in court before the judge. He would be going to state prison for making, selling and using drugs, his second trip there. I spent a couple of hours with him almost every day for a month. He was receptive to my advice and grew in righteousness during that month. Every day I would tell him, “If you want to see what the Lord will do, tell the judge the truth, that you are guilty as charged and are guilty of much more that you are not charged with.” He had a hard time accepting that part of my advice, but listened. When he went before the judge and the judge asked him how he pleaded, he said, “Judge, I’m guilty as charged and of much more that I’m not charged with.” The judge said, “I have never heard a plea like that. We will adjourn for lunch.” During lunch that young man, age 25, said, “I’m not going to lie anymore.” In the afternoon, the judge sentenced him to nine months in rehabilitation, which was a tremendous blessing and relief, and produced good results.

Lesson: We all need a frequent cleaning. It starts with conviction by the Holy Spirit [perhaps with the police’s help], humility [being caught in the act helps], full and truthful confession [no spinning], then forgiveness and cleansing. That process must occur between us and God and, as needed, us and man. Notice that humility plus the truth is powerful; dangerous in the flesh but powerful when in faith.

For that to happen, we are provided with Life’s Equation – Jesus said, “If [A]you abide in Me and [B] My words abide in you, [C] ask what you will and it will be done unto you.” So, why don’t we get more answers to our payers? Answer: We are focusing on [C], like the farm girl to whom the rich prince proposed marriage. She said “yes,” focusing on getting to live in the castle, having her own carriage, etc. That is us. Like Pogo said, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” We are offered intimacy with Christ and His life changing words [the Bible], but we are focused on the goodies instead of Him.

Let’s go into the Old Testament. Why? Because we are told several times in the New Testament that, 1) the things that happened to God’s people in the Old Testament happened to them for our sake, and 2) they were recorded for our sake. See Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11. The people of God in the Old Testament endured those trials for our sake! That makes me want to apologize to each of them for what we put them through, and thank them for what they did for us.

Let’s skim through the Old Testament for some of that precious history. Humanity was created, sinned and fell, was promised a Redeemer who would restore their relationship with God, free them from their enemies, give them rain instead of drought, answer their prayers, and provide them with life’s blessings. [Remember the above-mentioned three: muddy child, teenager’s wreck and attitude, and adult liar and druggie.]

You can guess what God’s Old Testament people did as they waited centuries for His coming – they prayed for Him to come; that’s good. But they wanted Him to come so He would drive out the Romans, heal their diseases, change their weather and, as the prophets continued saying, prosper them in all their ways. They pictured Him as what we might call their “Sugar Daddy.” Can you imagine that?! [Yes, because that’s a mirror we are looking at.] They had plans for Him! He was coming to make things right again between Him and them, but they wanted Him to come to meet their needs and fulfill their desires. Remember the Equation of Life: “If you abide in Me and My word abides in you, ask what you will and it shall be done unto you.” A plus B produces C. There are no shortcuts.

400 years before that Redeemer [Jesus] arrived, the Lord spoke through a prophet, Malachi. Malachi told God’s people they had things backward and detailed their problem with the Lord:

1) God loved them and had chosen them but they were not recognizing His love – 1:2-3. Being God’s chosen ones had ceased to draw a full-life commitment from them. Cpr.: I loved Nancy enough to choose her [and vs.] but my kind of love wanted to marry her for what I would get out of being married to her. Slowly, over those first five to ten painful years, as she and the Lord worked on me, I began to love her with the love that caused me to lay down my life for her. That’ God’s desire for all of His people.

2) Malachi told God’s people that they despised Him by giving Him less than they knew He wanted – 1:6-8. Cpr.: When I learned that Nancy really enjoyed back rubs and that she considered my rubbing and caressing her back a major expression of my love for her, I began doing it. I don’t think I have missed even ten of those every-night back rubs over the past 20 years.

3) Then Malachi said they were messing up their lives and families and culture by not making and keeping covenants; thus not getting their prayers answered – 2:13. Examples of covenants: Work, family, marriage, taxes, laws, and loving the Lord and our neighbor. His people thought those worldly things were their own business, not God’s, and that He should limit Himself to the religious sphere.

4) Their prayers wearied Him because they had changed evil to good and spread their messed-up theology to others – 2:17. Instead of addressing sin as sin, they proclaimed that God loved sinners anyway, the way they were. That twist of the truth lead to greater injustices instead of conviction of sin and repentance. They also called various sins righteousness, despite the clarity of His word on those matters. A current example of this is the world’s and church’s confusion on homosexuality.

5) They simply turned away from Him and His word – 3:7. Their response: “Who, us?!” They were not hungry for His word. They wanted Pablum, not vegetables or milk or meat. To them, God’s word was not a life-giving love letter to be read and reread and accepted above their own ideas.

6) He told them they were robbing God, which was the reason for their problems – 3:8-12. Their response: “You have to be kidding! We are God’s people! We attend temple services regularly.” But they and their land and possessions were His, not theirs, and they were not stewarding them according to His instructions. His ways were not “practical” so they devised other reasonable and necessary ways.

7) They said they had been worshipping Him the way they understood He wanted them to worship Him, even fasting, but that there had been none of the results He had promised [expressed with a little pout and foot stomp!] – 3:13-15. That was calling Him a liar. In return, He called them arrogant. They lost the theology battle but didn’t know or care about it.

But the Lord and Malachi were not through. Although it would be another 400 years before the Redeemer came, Malachi said that the Lord would send another prophet before the Redeemer. That was to be John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus the Redeemer. John encountered the same problem among God’s people; they did not see their need to repent. But John would not baptize them unless they were penitent. Three different groups asked, “What do we need to do to be baptized?” John’s answers were, 1) take care of the poor, 2) develop better business practices, and 3) stop lying and stealing, and learn to be content with your status and possessions. In other words, repent.

The story of Jesus the Redeemer’s arrival is familiar to us. Despite Malachi’s and John’s ministries of preparation for the Redeemer, Israel rejected Him. That’s today’s lesson to us. This Thought is about our need to recognize our need to repent, and to do it, meaning to live-out our repentance. 2 Chronicles 7:13-15 speaks to us as well as it spoke to King Solomon: “If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place.”

Our payer: Oh, Lord, you are building your house. Here we are. Give us the grace to be construction material that you will use, and to be available at your command. Amen.

1. Learning to communicate with the Lord takes time, and it is simple. It usually starts with letting go of our investment in a matter [that takes time] and learning to relax while not being in charge [that takes time] because He is the Lord, the Boss, who created and still controls all of creation. Then a strange and wonderful thing begins to happen. We begin to experience harmony with and trust in the Lord and others who are learning to communicate with Him [that takes time]. We experience the peace that comes from finally being relieved of being God [that took time]. Pursue that [it’s worth the time].
2. When we are thirsty, the Holy Spirit leads us to drink at the well of living waters where our needs are fulfilled. The well is the place where we are led due to our need, our dryness, our lack of that which we need for further life and service. It’s not a one-time event. We continue going back for more. In fact, we often camp near the well because we know our and others need for living water. Isaac’s wife was found at a well, Jacob found his wife at a well, and Moses found his wife at a well. In each case, the man had come to the well after a long journey and found at the well what he was seeking. The message: For that which you have long been seeking, go to the well and drink.
3. Psalm 127 is a popular Psalm, meaning the Lord uses it often to speak to His saints. Verse one speaks to the faithful who labor and pray for the body of Christ, especially for the building up of their local congregation. It goes, “Unless the Lord builds the house [Jesus said, ‘I will build my church.’ We are His material, not the builder. Staying close and behind the Lord helps us play our part in that effort.] they labor in vain who build it [Notice that laborers can indeed build something called ‘the house.’ It is not His house, but something we material can put together ourselves. But it is in vain; amounts to nothing despite the adoration heaped on the labors of our hands.]; unless the Lord guards the city [now the picture shifts to the house and other houses having been completed and needing guards. The choice of guards is either us or the Lord], the watchman keeps awake in vain [the Lord is the only watchman who can recognize the enemies and do something about them].

God’s house is built and kept only by the Lord. When our eyes, minds, ears and hearts become sufficiently dead to self and alive to the Lord, we will see, think, hear and desire the Lord and His leadership instead of our own. He desires us and will bring us into Him as we lay down our crowns [self-exaltations] at His feet.

1. This is a shirt-button-buster testimony, it being about a son and his family. This is the second marriage for both him and his wife. They have been married for about 10 years. It is blessed, the Lord having lifted them above life’s problems and drawn them close to Himself. I will focus this segment of their testimony on my son’s step daughter, now age 18, recently graduated from high school and headed for college. The whole family, including their three-year old son, are dedicated to the Lord.

The following is a text she sent to her step-dad on Father’s Day, this June: “Happy Father’s Day! Thanks for being an example of what a dad should be like and a man of Christ is like! I couldn’t ask for a better step-dad. You have really changed the image of what a dad is in my mind. Also thank you for being an amazing husband to my mom and loving her like she deserves to be loved. I could not thank you more for that! I love you!”

That’s my step-granddaughter!

1. What happened to overcomers that they can be labeled overcomers – that they have earned and been granted that particular label of and from Jesus? I would say, on this, another occasion for defining overcomer, that they were ready for the fire before they were thrust into it. Then their fires refined them. They did not seek their fires [temptations and testings] but were not afraid of them; did not pull back when faced with them. Jesus did not join them in their fires; He was already there. The fires had no power over Him, so the fires had no power over them. You can be encouraged further in Daniel 3.

 Dodi Li V’Ani Lo