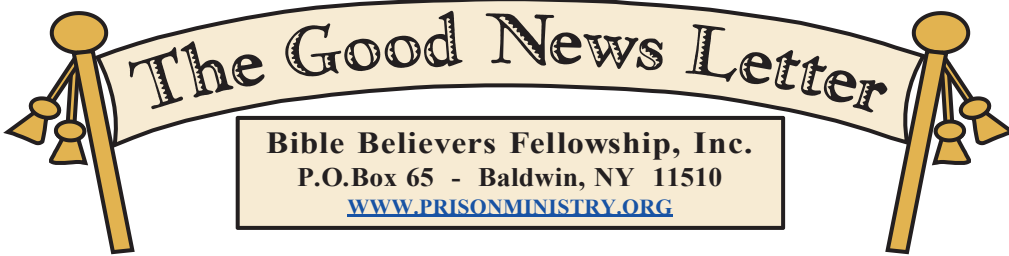




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TAX-EXEMPT

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” MARK 16:15

August 2024

## FROM US TO YOU

Jesus Christ once stated, “...Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand” (Matthew 12:25 NIV). That is just as true today. It is also emblematic of current American politics. This country is divided into mostly two parts, Republicans and Democrats. And there are an assortment of minor political parties as well. Jesus was right of course. This once united country has been falling apart from within. It didn't start out that way. The early settlers of America had many conflicts and obstacles to overcome, such as native attacks, wild animals, problems with the weather and difficult terrain. But they were God-fearing, hard-working, determined people who carved out a nation together with one goal in mind. They wanted a land where they could all live as free people, where they could raise their children in safety and biblical values, and pull together a country that they could proudly call home.

They marked their money with the emblem, “In God Do We Trust.” And they chose “The Star Spangled Banner” as their national anthem. The fourth stanza of which says, “O thus be it ever, when free men shall stand. Between their loved homes and the war's desolation Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the Heav'n rescued land. **Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation!** Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just. And this be our motto: ‘In God is our trust.’ And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!” And children were taught the pledge of allegiance: “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation **under God**, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” What has happened to that godly unity America once had when it was considered a great nation?

There are those in America who sneer at the term “Make America Great Again.” God made this country great. Satan wants to rip it apart. Those who don't want America to be great again call those who do, “MAGA” people. There is one candidate who wants America to be great again, to return to that which once gave America her greatness. That candidate is President Donald Trump. Yes, we know he's not perfect. We don't have any perfect people. Even Jesus Christ could not be elected as president these days! There were those who did the devil's work in His day and hated Christ (see John 7:19). However, no one could be more perfect than God the Son (Deuteronomy 32:3-4). As for our human leaders, God said that the human “...heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve” (Jeremiah 17:9-10 NIV). So God uses imperfect humans to rule over us. God will allow countries who worship idols to be run by the demons they worship, the ones they deserve. That's why some countries don't have freedom. It is Satan who takes away people's freedom. Christ sets you free (see John 8:31- 32)!



God chooses the most capable leaders for those nations who, at least, respect Him. God chose George Washington to get America off to a good start at becoming a nation. And He chose Winston Churchill to get England through World War 2. In truth, politics is not the answer to America's problems. God is! The Lord is the one who chooses our rulers based on our relationship with Him.

Those nations who love the Lord will be run by those who respect God. However, the devil is always planning to find ways of leading even strong Christians astray. So be careful in your walk with God! “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the **spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms**” (Ephesians 6:12 NIV). The phrase, “heavenly realms” refers to the earthly atmosphere. It's not referring to heavenly angels (see Revelation 12:9). Even regarding the rulers of the Roman Empire in the days of Christ, Jesus told Pontius Pilate, “... You would have no power over Me if it were not given to you from above...” (John 19:11 NIV).

So, if you're a Christian, it is important that you keep your priorities straight. Don't take your spiritual eyes of Christ and replace Him with any political candidate! Christ should always be your first love (Revelation 2:4). As we mentioned earlier, God is all powerful. He can make good things happen, and He can keep bad things from happening. For example, we believe it was due to all the prayers Christians made on behalf of President Trump, that God protected him from nearly being assassinated this year in mid-July. However, the Lord has made it clear that we should always make a distinction between the holy and the profane (Ezekiel 22:26). Jesus was livid when salespeople in His day were using the temple to buy and sell things. Even if the money made is meant for charity it's wrong. God's house is to remain holy! Jesus “...made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves He said, ‘Get these out of here! How dare you turn My Father's house into a market!’ His disciples remembered that it is written: ‘Zeal for Your house will consume Me’” (John 2:15-17 NIV. Also, see Psalm 69:9). Therefore, we believe it is also not appropriate to have politicians speaking from church altars.

Politics is not holy! Even the best of America's leadership has never been holy. Few, if any, have been righteous. The best we can hope for is that they be God-fearing (Psalm 111:10). By all means if you are an adult citizen, be sure to vote. Thank God you still have that right! However, don't let politics distract you from your walk with God. As Paul told Timothy, “Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer” (2 Timothy 2:3-4 NIV).

In the Lord's service, *Eric and Anne Kaestner*

# Opiate for the Masses

By Anne Kaestner

Karl Marx once said “Religion is the opiate of the masses.” It was obviously a complaint that it is difficult to persuade people to believe anything that is against their religious beliefs. Marx was an atheist from a child. He was the one on which Marxism was founded. Among Christians, he is infamous for writing the Communist Manifesto, along with Friedrich Engels. Marx thought he had all the answers to the perfect world system, communism. His problem with religion was that it got in the way of his ideas of creating a “perfect world” for mankind, without dependency on any deity. I suppose in some ways it was spiritually similar to the idea that Gene Roddenberry had when he created the popular sci-fi show of the 1960’s, “Star Trek.” Neither system involved true Christianity. Roddenberry envisioned an idealistic world where mankind overcame nearly all obstacles to get along together no matter what deity they chose to worship. (Or what demon you listen to.) Sounds a lot like man-made religion. It makes all the choices on how it will please the deity it chooses to worship. And yet, in “Star Trek” they were still able to achieve great things, spreading out their ideal civilization to other planets. Every society has been based on their own set of beliefs, usually handed down to them through family history or government edict. And it becomes so ingrained into the reasoning of the people that they stubbornly adhere to it as a part of their spiritual identity.

When I was a child, the book “Animal Farm” by George Orwell was required reading in school. Orwell (whose real name was Eric Arthur Blair) had a very different view from Marx. He knew that communism was not the answer to society’s problems. He was raised in the Anglican church in England, but was partially indoctrinated by Catholic teachings as a youth. I found his book “Animal Farm” very enlightening. The animals wanted to set up a form of communism on the farm, where they expected a perfect government to develop, a utopia. The problem was, who would run it? Who would set the rules and standards, and who would punish the wrongdoers?

They tried to make it work without any deity, for communism is without any. However, there was no perfect animal on the farm that was good enough to rule over the others. Eventually, they gave up hope. The book ended on a cynical note. In the end, Orwell came to the conclusion that a utopia, or communism, created by mankind, would not work either. Sadly, he committed suicide on January 21, 1950, at only 46 years old.

Without **true Christianity**, there really is no hope for a perfect world. That is because Satan, the devil, is running this world system (Matthew 4:8-10), with the help of his fellow fallen angels (Revelation 12:7-9), turned demons (Deuteronomy 32:17 NIV). God, the Creator, is not running it. God gave that right to Adam. However, Adam was persuaded to sin by his wife, who was deceived by the devil’s cunning (Genesis 3:1). Satan, the devil, had entered into the body of a snake (see Revelation 12:9). Eve ate the forbidden fruit because the devil convinced her not to trust God (Genesis 3:1-5). Therefore, she fell into Satan’s trap and became his slave (John 8:34). Stupidly, Adam ate the forbidden fruit as well, and lost all the authority that God had given him (Genesis 1:28-30). As a result, Satan gained all that Adam had because everyone who sins against God enters into the devil’s domain. The final consequence of that is to end up in Hell (Mark 9:42-49), and then, the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14-15), where Satan and his demons will eventually spend eternity. I specified the term “true Christianity” because there are many religious beliefs that call themselves “Christian.” However, any form of “Chris-

tianity” other than that taught by Christ and His apostles is not the real thing. It’s just religion, the so-called “opiate of the masses.” An opiate is a drug. And, like all drugs, it is dangerous to use without a prescription.

The church that the Apostle Paul had started in Galatia was originally pure in faith and doctrine because Paul had started it. When Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ and died (Matthew 27:3-5), I believe Christ chose Paul to replace him (Acts 9:4-5). Christ chose all His disciples personally, not the church. Then, apparently something had happened to the Galatian church after Paul left them. Someone else had taught them some bad doctrine. When he heard about it, Paul was greatly alarmed. He wrote to the church saying, “*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a **different gospel**—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to **pervert** the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not*

*be a servant of Christ”* (Gal. 1:6-10 NIV). That seems to be the problem with churches that start out loyal to Christ then suddenly bad doctrine enters into them, and it destroys the purity of their faith. That is why Protestant Christian churches come in so many different denominations. (Catholicism is a religion, not a denomination.) Man-made ideas and concepts destroy their purity that was once there. Paul had a similar problem with the Ephesian church. He told them, “*I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and **distort the truth** in order to draw away disciples after*

*them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of His grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified”* (Acts 20:29-32 NIV). As Carl Marx stated, “Religion is the opiate of the masses.”

And, speaking of opiates, I once knew a young man at a church I used to attend in Staten Island before I got married. His name was John. He had come to Christ at “Ridgewood Pentecostal Church” in Queens, New York, some time around the mid 1970’s. However, he liked a Christian radio show that was started by my church on Staten Island, “Richmond Pentecostal Church.” John had been strongly addicted to drugs and was still getting his fix from a New York City run methadone assisted program. At first, John exhibited a strong interest in Christianity. He was regularly reading his Bible and attending church. In fact, he attended my church in Staten Island one weekend and we became friends. I felt the Presence of God in John at the beginning. Nevertheless, the devil’s tug on him was still present.

After a few weeks, I learned that all his life, John had been the kind of person who couldn’t take pressure very well, and that’s why he had become so addicted. It was an escape system for him because he couldn’t handle the stress of everyday life. He also had a long prison record and had been in and out of psychiatric hospitals frequently. When I first met him, I didn’t know anything about John’s history. He seemed like such a sweet Christian man to me. Yet, after





a while, I found out that he was starting to backslide into his past. A restaurant owner at his church offered John a job. However, John said he wouldn't make enough money that way and that he had to get paid "off the books." I soon realized John wasn't making enough of a determination to give up the drugs. He had lived a life where he had insisted on getting his own way about everything, or he would cause trouble. His relatives told me that John's father and grandfather had been just like him, with quick violent tempers. However, there is no evidence that they ever accepted Christ. John had. So he was given the strength to become an overcomer (see 1 John 5:4-5). I wish I could tell you that, after he turned to Christ, John overcame the obstacles of his past. However, that didn't happen. He just wouldn't give up the drugs. He wanted Christ but, as time went by, the devil used the drugs to regain control of his life. A serious relationship with the Lord cannot work that way. Jesus said, "...he that shall **endure unto the end, the same shall be saved**" (Matthew 24:13 KJV). I eventually stopped seeing John. I had just about given up hope of him returning to Christ. Months later, I heard from Frank, John's Christian friend who had taken John to "Ridgewood Pentecostal Church." He called me up one night and told me that John was dead at just 25 years old. He had died of a brain hemorrhage from the drugs.

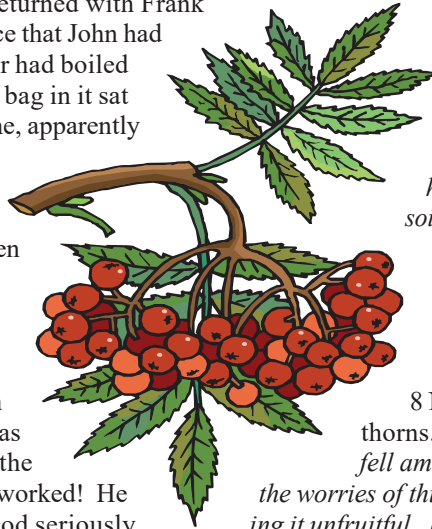
John had lived with his mother and sister, and he had reached a point where both of them left their apartment temporarily and moved in with relatives. A week or so later, they had returned with Frank and found a gory scene. There was some evidence that John had been making himself a cup of tea. A pot of water had boiled up over the burners and an empty cup with a tea bag in it sat on the cook top. According to what Frank told me, apparently something had happened that made John so out of control that even drugs could not calm him down. Frank said there was blood everywhere and rigor mortis had already started. John had been dead for several days in a hot New York summer. The whole apartment smelled from his body.

I attended John's funeral with a representative from my church and Frank told me that two people from the Ridgewood church had been given dreams that John was in Heaven. From what I was told, I believe John had finally concluded that the only hope for him was Christ. Nothing else had worked! He hadn't been taking his new relationship with God seriously enough to get off of the drugs. As a result, he had reverted back to his previous life of crime and all was lost in it. Then he remembered that Jesus still loved him. All was not completely lost. He had no hope left in this world, only in Christ. I believe, in utter desperation, he repented of his sin, returned to God, and asked God to bring him home right away (John 14:2-3). The end of John's life in this world, with his addiction, had been a total disaster. Nevertheless, since he finally came to Christ, at least his new beginning in Heaven was good. One of the people from the church, who had been given a dream of John in Heaven, saw him looking at a bunch of horses.

Obviously, when all hope was gone for John in this world, God had not given up on him. And John still had enough common sense to repent of his sins and turn to the Lord in the end. But how much better it would have been for him if he had brought some fruit with him. The potential was there. John had a lot of the Holy Spirit in him when I first knew him. But eventually, as in the case of King Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-15) the Holy Spirit had left him and a demon spirit took over his life. Happily, unlike Saul, he repented in time. If he had only been able to have enough determination to get off of the drugs, God could have really used him in a mighty way. When you are "Born Again" (John 3:3), you must cling to Christ the way fruit clings to the vine until it is ready to be harvested. Jesus said, "**Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain**

*in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the Vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples"* (John 15:4-8 NIV).

Of course, we're talking about **spiritual** fruit. The apostle Paul taught us, "*The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit*" (Galatians 5:19-25 NIV). Therefore, don't be like John, who just barely got into Heaven with meager fruit. As a true Christian, you have to just trust God and, with His help, turn your back on the past, and grow closer to Jesus. John wanted



to give up the past, but he had let things go too far. John was like the seed in the Lord's parable about the Sower. "*A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown*" (Matt. 13:3-8 NIV). As for John, he was the seed that fell among

thorns. Jesus said, "*The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown*" (Matthew 13:22-23 NIV).

God could have helped him if John had been able to have the strength of character to give up his past and the drugs. Rev. David Wilkerson's book "The Cross or the Switchblade" details many young men and women in violent New York street gangs who came to Christ and, with God's help, had the determination to give up their past and live for Him. Yet, these days, the drugs people use are even stronger than what was available in those days. But God is still stronger! Jerome Callahan, a man who used to work for us, had been a drug addict and a criminal. He gave up the drugs and crime, and turned into a strong Christian. I remember a Christian man who used to go to a church I attended decades ago. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and everyone who knew him could feel God's Presence in him. His name was Ray. He gave his testimony one day. He had been Born Again (see John 3:3) for what seemed like a long time to him. Even so, Ray was still addicted to cigarettes. He loved the Lord and hated the cigarettes, yet he had not been able to give them up. This went on for quite a while. Then, one day, he became more urgent in his prayers. He said he had put everything else in his life on hold and got serious with the Lord. His relationship with Christ was more important to him than anything else! **(Continued on Page 4)**

## Opiate for the Masses (Continued From Page 3)

He begged the Lord to make the craving for cigarettes go away. God answered Ray's prayer. He proudly stated that he doesn't have the craving anymore. It had been many years since he had been delivered! Praise God. Do you have an obstacle in your life that is keeping you from having the kind of relationship with Christ that you want? This is the secret to becoming an overcomer (see 1 John 5:4 and Revelation 2:11). Examine yourself inside and out. And then ask yourself if there is anything else in your life that you love more than Jesus Christ? If so, put Jesus first above it all. God put your salvation ahead of the suffering of "...His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16 NIV).

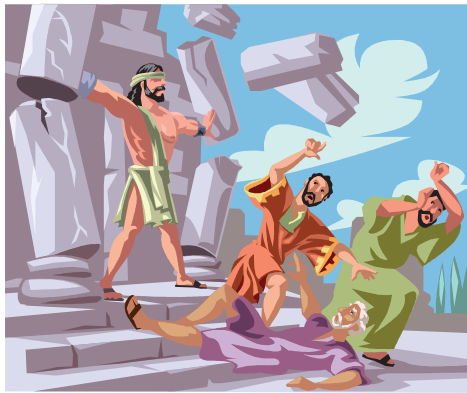
Sin is like a drug. It enslaves you. It entraps you like a spider and her prey. It binds you so that it's impossible to get off of Satan's grip, without Christ (see John 14:6). No religion is going to help you! Christ is the only one with the keys to His kingdom. He gave those keys to His true Bride, the church (Matthew 9:15, 25:1-13). The real Bride of Christ is not any church building or human structure (Isaiah 66:1-2, Mark 7:7-9). It is restricted to those who **cling** to God's Holy Vine, Jesus Christ. Religion is human, man's attempt to reach God. Only God's **true** church has the keys. That church is Christ's Bride (see 2 Corinthians 11:2-3 and Isaiah 54:5). It is a spiritual church built totally on **faith**, like the statement that Simon Peter made, when Jesus, "...asked His disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But what about you?' He asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was **not** revealed to you by man, but by My Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter; and on **this rock** I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it'" (Matthew 16:13-18 NIV). "...And **that rock was Christ**" (1 Corinthians 10:4 NIV. Also, see Matthew 7:24-27).

All of us get tempted by the devil and his demons, from time to time. That also included Jesus when He was on earth (Hebrews 4:15). Therefore, James tells those who love the Lord, "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err; My beloved brethren*" (James 1:12-16 KJV).

Samson is another man on whom God had compassion on despite his many sins and failures. Samson had been mightily blessed by God. He was a Nazirite chosen by God before he was born. His mother, had been unable to give birth until God blessed her with a special child. "*The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him, and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol*" (Judges 13:24-25 NIV). Samson was one of Israel's judges (Judges chapters 13-16). He had been given supernatural strength to fight God's enemies, which at that time, were mostly the Philistines. He killed thousands of them to protect Israel. However, like John, Samson didn't take his relationship with God, and all His blessings, seriously. He was deceived by Delilah, a prostitute he fell in love with. He should have known better. She had been hired by the Philistines to

find out the source of Samson's strength. It was his hair. He was a Nazirite. She tried many times to find out what it was and each time the Philistines were waiting to catch him. You would think he would have realized she was trying to betray him. He didn't. In this case the term "all brawn and no brains" fit Samson nicely. Finally, Delilah cajoled him so much that he told her what his source of strength was.

"*When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, 'Come back once more; he has told me everything.'* So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands. Having put him to sleep on her lap, she called a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him. Then she called, 'Samson, the Philistines are upon you!' He awoke from his sleep and thought, 'I'll go out as before and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the LORD had left him. Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding in the prison" (Judges 16:18-21 NIV). This is a sad story of a man who was once used in a mighty way by God. However, like John, Samson finally came to his senses and repented of his sin. It would have seemed too late. But God has great compassion for our human weaknesses after we repent. Yet there is always a price to be paid in human terms. Like John, Samson died. Before that, "...the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to celebrate, saying, 'Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands'" (Judges 16:22-23 NIV).



"*While they were in high spirits, they shouted, 'Bring out Samson to entertain us.'* So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them. When they stood him among the pillars, Samson said to the servant who held his hand, 'Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them.' Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. Then Samson prayed to the LORD, 'O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.' Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines!' Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived" (Judges 16:25-30 NIV).

It is the same way with religion. It's like an opiate. It binds people and controls them and blinds them to the truth. Likewise, the demons laugh at the foolish things people do in the name of religion. Cults have caused mass suicide, like the Jones town massacre or the Heaven's Gate deaths, where people thought they were going up in a spaceship. Some of the Moslem faith think that killing Christians and Jews benefits them in Paradise. They end up in Hell instead (see James 3:6 and Revelation 21:8). And for Catholics, kissing the Pope's ring is just another form of idolatry (Matthew 4:10, Revelation 15:4). "*For there is **one** God and **one** mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time*" (1 Timothy 2:5-6 NIV). Let no one deceive you! "*Salvation is found in **no one else**, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12 NIV).