



NON-PROFIT



TAX-EXEMPT

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

AUTUMN 2012

FROM US TO YOU

As we begin this new issue we want to talk to all Christians who are suffering. Misery comes in many forms, economic, physical, emotional, family. Some of it hits Christians who truly love Jesus Christ and try to live for Him. However, most of it is brought on by the decisions and lifestyles chosen by those who rebel against the Lord. Let's begin with the true servant of God. For, *“many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all...”* (Psalms 34:19-22 KJV). Has God made you a promise of good things, but instead, your situation gets worse? If so, you're not alone! God promised Joseph that his father, step-mother, and eleven brothers would bow down to him (Genesis 37:9-11). But Joseph's situation got worse, not better. He was sold into slavery by his own brothers, accused of a crime he didn't commit, and sent to prison (see Genesis 37:12-36 and 39:1-20). Then, right when it appeared that he would get out of prison, nothing happened (Genesis 40:1-23). Joseph had every reason to feel discouraged and depressed. What happened to the promise God gave him? At this point the devil probably told him that the Lord is cruel and was mocking him. Yet Joseph refused the temptation to blame the Lord. Nor did he allow self pity to take root in his heart.

Then, about a year later, Pharaoh had a dream and only Joseph was given the interpretation by God. The Lord had brought Joseph through all kinds of trials and tests of faith (James 1:2-4). And he had passed every test. It was then that the Lord used this whole miserable situation to raise Joseph up to the place where he would be the second ruler in all of Egypt (Genesis 41:1-41). Then when a grain famine came along, Joseph was prepared for it. His granary was filled and ready to sell to his hungry brothers who then came to buy it from him. And that's when they bowed down to him, not realizing that it was their own brother who stood before them (Genesis 41:53 thru 42:6)! Wheat is symbolic of the true servant of God. Chaff is symbolic of those who mix in among God's flock, but are not really living for Him. They want His blessings, but are not willing to submit to His will! (Matt. 3:12. Also, see 13:24-30). God uses a technique we call the bow and arrow affect. When an archer wants to propel an arrow forward, he brings it backward into the bow or it will not have the strength to move forward. And when God wants to use you to do great things, He begins by humbling you so that you will not rely on your own strength, but trust solely in His! It may seem like all hell has brought its forces against you, and you feel so weak and alone. *“...This is what the LORD says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s!’”* (2 Chronicles 20:15 NIV)!

Throughout the Bible, God has used His bow and arrow technique whenever He wants to empower His servant to do great things. Daniel was taken as a prisoner of war, and was almost killed for his faith (see Daniel 6:19-22). God passed up all of David's brothers and had Samuel anoint him the next king of Israel (1 Samuel 16:13). However, instead of getting better, David's situation got much worse! For Saul was still

the king at that time, and he set out to find David and kill him! David was living in caves, fearing for his life, before God finally made him king of Israel. When David was depending on the Lord to protect him, his dedication was strong. But, as often happens when the Lord blesses us, David became complacent in his faith and that's when the devil was able to lure him into his sin with Bathsheba. And because sin leads to more sin, David actually plotted and succeeded in arranging the death of Bathsheba's husband, in order to cover up his own sin (2 Samuel 11:2 thru 12:10)! Everyone wants to live on the mountaintop, shouting hallelujah. However, in biblical times, battles were never fought on the mountaintops. It was in the deep valleys! As David wrote during the time he spent hiding from Saul, *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me”* (Psalms 23:4 NIV).

During one of the hardest battles we fought at the beginning of



our ministry, Anne, who was the primary victim of the attack, prayed, “Lord, why is this happening to me?” God replied to her heart, “If you don't go through the battle, you will not get the victory.” Anne trusted God and took that step of faith, and before she got to the battle line, she received the victory! The Lord doesn't want us to stagnate in our faith and get stale. If an army doesn't keep moving, it will never get to its destination. That's why these battles come along. For each time we pass the tests given to us, we learn so much from them and grow stronger in our faith! And for every mountaintop, there's always a new valley ahead. As the Jews learned after God delivered them from Egyptian bondage, the tests of faith continue to keep us moving forward and will not

stop until we get to our promised land. Even the Apostle Paul, with all else that he suffered, still had his thorn in the flesh to keep him humble (2 Corinthians 12:7). As Job said, in the midst of his fierce affliction, *“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God... How my heart yearns within me!”* (Job 19:25-27 NIV).

Satan will dangle his bait right under your nose. Like the forbidden fruit, it will seem good to your senses (see Genesis 3:6). But there's a hook in there that the devil will use to reel you in! *“...Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death”* (James 1:14-15 NIV). Jesus said, *“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light”* (Matthew 11:29-30 NIV). The only way to obtain true peace and joy in your heart despite circumstances is to trust in God (Proverbs 3:5-7). *“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:7 NIV).

In the Love of Christ, *Eric and Anne Kaestner*

THE IMPORTANCE OF PUTTING CHRIST FIRST

By Anne W. Kaestner

Years ago I worked for a company that sent me out on temporary assignments. On one such occasion, the boss had not come in yet and I volunteered to make the coffee. One of the employees told me later that no one would drink it because I made it too strong. Someone else, hearing the comment, said "The boss will. He likes strong coffee." A little while later he arrived. He tasted it and asked, "Who made the coffee?" "I did," I said. "This is great coffee!" he replied. I thought about the experience when planning this article. For after we accept Christ as our Savior and Lord, He becomes our boss! And He is the one we must serve first! The boss in my anecdote was the most important person to please. None of us would have been there if not for him. He was the one who gave us work to do, just as God has prepared specific work for us (Ephesians 2:10). The boss did the hiring and firing. This could be compared to us becoming a part of the Vine of Christ or being cut from the Vine (John 15:1-6, Isaiah 64:6). Christ brings us into His kingdom, just as the boss in my anecdote hires his staff. And Christ expects to take first place in our lives (see Mathew 10:33-39), just as a boss wants to receive loyalty from his staff.

According to a recent ABC News poll, 83% of Americans consider themselves Christian. And according to the Hartford Institute for Religious Research, there are approximately 335,000 churches in the United States. So why are we having so many problems in this country? Our economy is in a tailspin. We always seems to be at war somewhere in the world (Matthew 24:6-7). Natural disasters are increasing at a rapid rate! I don't remember such horrible weather conditions as I was growing up. Third world countries had them occasionally. But not the United States! So what's going on? Why does it appear that God is angry at America, not to mention other formally Christian nations? I believe it is because Jesus Christ has been dismissed as just a footnote in history. Even in discussions of the weather, God gets no credit. He is referred to as "mother nature." Weather men on television use phrases like, "We're going to try to push some of those clouds away by tomorrow." Upon hearing that one day, I said to my husband, "You get on one side of the cloud and I'll get on the other." If you want to know why there is flooding in one area and a drought in another read Amos 4:7-9. Of the churches we've attended, social pursuits have been in abundance. True repentance (Matthew 3:2, 4:17) and Holy Spirit revival is almost extinct! One church had a fashion show and a "beautiful baby contest." Another loved their skits. My mother used to say to me, "You should have gone Anne. David was so funny last night." Is that what we go to church for? If I had any interest in seeing a skit, or comedy act, I'd go to a night club. But the closer I have gotten to Christ, the less interest I have in the carnality of this world (John 17:14-16 and 1 John 2:15-17).

Jesus Christ was not a stand up comedian! Nor is there any instance of Him telling jokes! When I was in my twenties, my sister invited some of her friends to my parent's house one evening. They were from the church my family attended on Long Island. I was living in Staten Island back then, and went to a different church. However, I happened to be at my parent's house at the time. My sister and her friends were eager to go into the city to see what they called a "Christian" musical called "Godspell". But they had no transportation, and I had a car. "All the actors in it are Christians," they told me. They convinced me to go with them, although I was

skeptical. When we got there, I was shocked at what I saw! My Savior, Jesus Christ, was portrayed as a clown! I felt no Presence of God in it. Instead it was a raucous, salacious, mockery of the Lord! When I told one of my companions that this was blasphemy, she replied, "Oh, Anne, I'm sure God has a sense of humor." Oh, really? The only times the Bible tells us that God laughs is right before He brings judgment (Psalm 2:4 & 37:13). He is laughing at their stupidity! Do you think it is just a coincidence that the musical I mentioned is called "Godspell"? Satan is the one with the sense of humor! He's the one laughing at the foolishness of many modern church goers. For he has cast a "spell" of deception over the people of "God." This reminds me of the words of Paul, "*I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ*" (2 Corinthians 11:2-3 NIV).

When we were in Salem, Massachusetts years ago we met a young man who told us that the pastor at his church invited a rock group to perform. He said it was to bring in the young people. I say, why not put in slot machines, serve alcohol, and hire a stripper to perform? That will bring in even more people, if that's what your criteria is! Of course I'm being sarcastic. But in too many churches

the pastor is more concerned with having a big congregation, and a heavier collection plate than in getting out the pure Word of God. Jude spoke about shepherds like that in Jude 1:4 and 1:12. Jesus called them "ferocious wolves" (Matthew 7:15) and "hired hands" (John 10:11-15). In Old Testament times the Jews began to drift away from God, who had blessed them so greatly (Nehemiah 9:6-37). And they began making friends with the pagans and accepting their customs. As a result, they made the Lord "*...jealous with their foreign gods and angered Him with their detestable idols. They sacrificed to demons, which are not God -- gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear. You deserted the*



Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth" (Deuteronomy 32:16-18 NIV). That can be said of many in the church today! I was sad to hear that the divorce rate has jumped way up among the baby boomer generation. That's my generation! I feel so blessed that Eric and I have been happily married for thirty-two years. And we give all the credit to the Lord, who has kept us close to His heart.

As Paul wrote regarding the latter-day church, "*...There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves [self esteem gospel], lovers of money [prosperity gospel], boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love... rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God [fun gospel] -- having a form of godliness but denying its Power...*" (2 Timothy 3:1-5 NIV). So what is the number one stumbling block that keeps Christians from growing in Christ? It is putting something else first in their hearts before Him! Let's start with the family. Do you love your family more than you love the Lord? Putting family first is epidemic in the church today! However, Jesus said, "*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law -- a man's enemies will be the*

members of his own household. Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:34-37 NIV). Shortly before Eric and I started this ministry, the church we attended expected everyone to buy Bible studies the pastor purchased, and attend meetings regarding them. I resisted the idea because most Bible studies tend to take scripture out of context in order to promote their own doctrine. They ignore verses that dispute their teachings and harp on others that they can amplify to fit their own purpose (John 10:12-15, Acts 20:29, Galatians 1:6-10). However, Eric wanted to go. So I went with him. We only attended one meeting because, as it turned out, I was right. Their doctrine implied that we do not need the Holy Spirit. That is totally contrary to true Bible teaching (Luke 12:12, John 14:26, 1 Corinthians 2:14)! We were all asked about the major obstacles in our Christian faith. Other than Eric and I, the answer was unanimous. Every one of them took on a gloomy expression and began complaining about their family problems. They used phrases like, “My mother doesn’t understand me since I became a Christian.” Or, “My family is always picking on me.”

The problem was that they were trying to please both Christ and their family at the same time. And their family did not know Christ! Jesus said, “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other...” (Luke 16:13 NIV). When the Apostle Paul came to accept Christ as his Savior, he lost everything he had gained in the world (see Philippians 3:7-11), including a good relationship with his family. In fact, he never mentions them. There is no record of them visiting him, even when he was in prison or sick. At the end of his life he wrote, “At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me...” (2 Timothy 4:16 NIV). Like Jesus (Matthew 12:48-50), Paul considered his real family to be those who loved Christ (Romans 16:1-16, 1 Corinthians 4:17), and were born of the second birth, not the first (John 1:12-13 and 3:3)! At the time of his letter to Timothy, many of them were in prison or had already been killed. Your family must not come before Jesus Christ! Neither must you straddle the fence between trying to please them and the Lord. For if they are worldly (Romans 8:6-9, Ephesians 2:1-5), or even lukewarm believers (Revelation 3:16), they will resent your walk with Christ and react with hostility to your love for Him (Isaiah 59:15). On one occasion, Jesus said to a man, “‘Follow Me.’ But the man replied, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead [spiritually] bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ Still another said, ‘I will follow You, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family.’ Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God’” (Luke 9:59-62 NIV). In other words, once you make a commitment to follow Christ, you cannot worry about how your family will take it.

When you spend your time trying to please your unsaved family, they will turn your interests away from the Lord and toward “...the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth...” (Matthew 13:22 NIV). If you do remain faithful to Christ, you will lose friends, family members will turn against you (see Matthew 10:36), and even your financial future may be in jeopardy. However, “we live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7 NIV). Your faith will certainly be tested. The Lord will bring you to the precipice of disaster before He turns

your misery into victory (Genesis 22:6-12, Daniel 3:17-28, 6:21-22) “And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19 NIV. Also, see Psalm 37:25). The reason why you can’t please both your worldly, or backslidden family and the Lord is because “...friendship with the world is hatred toward God. Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4 NIV). Look at the examples of Joseph and David. Joseph’s brothers hated him so much that they beat him up and sold him into slavery (Genesis 37:2-28). Likewise, when the prophet Samuel went to anoint one of Jesse’s sons the next king of Israel, his father lined up all David’s older brothers. But he didn’t even think of calling David. So Samuel “...asked Jesse, ‘Are these all the sons you have?’ ‘There is still the youngest,’ Jesse answered, ‘but he is tending the sheep.’ Samuel said, ‘Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives’” (1 Samuel 16:11 NIV). David was rejected by his family, but he was the one God chose (1 Samuel 16:7)! When David was sent to take food to his brothers who were all afraid to fight Goliath, he became angry at the giant’s taunting. “David asked the men standing near him, ‘...Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?’ ...When Eliab, David’s oldest brother, heard him..., he burned with anger at him and asked, ‘Why have you come down here? And with whom did

you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.’ ‘Now what have I done?’ said David. ‘Can’t I even speak?’” (1 Samuel 17:26-29 NIV).

Even Jesus was patronized by His family, who thought He was crazy, and wanted to take Him home. Jesus knew their thoughts and, “He replied... ‘Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?’ Pointing to His disciples, He said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers. For whoever does the will of My Father in Heaven is My brother and sister and mother’” (Matthew 12:48-50 NIV). On another occasion, “...Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take His life. But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus’ brothers said to Him, ‘You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that Your disciples may see the miracles You do. No one who wants to become a public

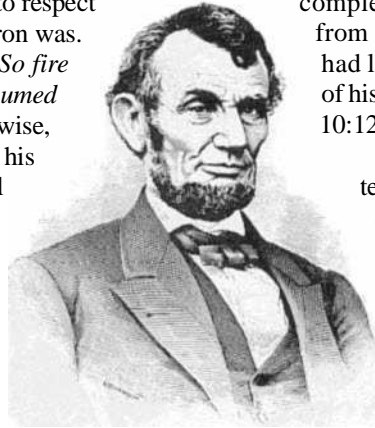
figure acts in secret. Since You are doing these things, show Yourself to the world.’ For even His own brothers did not believe in Him” (John 7:1-5 NIV). His brothers must have known that the Jewish leaders wanted to kill him, but they still encouraged Him to go! When I was a little girl in England, years before I accepted Christ as my Savior, I attended a church service with my mother. In those days she treated me with love. For I had not yet come to Christ. The pastor gave a particularly good sermon. He emphasized the love of God that Jesus was willing to suffer such agony to give us salvation (John 3:16). Some time later, I asked my mother, “Would you be willing to be crucified in my place?” “Oh no,” she said. “Because that’s such a horrible way to die, isn’t it?” She loved me back then. But Jesus loved me more! How many parents love their child enough to take their place to be spit at, beaten, flogged, tortured with a crown of thorns, stripped naked, mocked in front of a crowd, and crucified (Matthew 27:26-37)? Only God could love you that much! Yet He is the one who is taken for granted and receives the least amount of love and worship in most churches these days!

I once spoke on the phone with a man (Continued On Page 4)



who worked for a Christian publishing firm. He was all excited about an upcoming ball game. He asked me if I was planning to watch it. I told him that I am a Christian and therefore, wasn't interested. He asked me what I meant. He considered himself a Christian too. I replied, "I don't think that there is anything wrong with it if you want to kick a ball around with your kids in your backyard. But as for professional sports, it becomes idolatry. Old baseball cards can be worth a fortune just because they have a picture of some athlete on them. Men will sit in front of their televisions for hours watching a ball game but won't spend half an hour in prayer or Bible study. And the money the athletes get is ridiculous. Many athletes have been arrested for wife beating or drunk driving. Some cheat by using performance enhancing drugs. And yet they are idols to millions of fans! People will camp out all night in freezing weather or pouring rain just to get a good seat at a game. In some nations, people have been stampeded to death in stadiums. Riots have taken place at some games, especially soccer. It has spilled out into the streets where cars have been vandalized and store windows have been broken." "I never thought of it that way," he replied. Pride, money, sports, fashion, houses, and family are among the many things that Christians put ahead of the Lord. Even some of God's own prophets have fallen into the trap of putting their children before God. Aaron was one of them. He did not raise his sons, Nadab and Abihu, to respect God. Yet they were made priests as their father Aaron was. As a result, they blasphemed the Holy Spirit. "...So fire came out from the Presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died..." (Leviticus 10:1-2 NIV). Likewise, Eli, the priest, also sinned against God by allowing his sons to commit all kinds of wickedness (1 Samuel 2:22-24). All he did was give them a soft reprimand. By then Eli was an old man and it was too late to stop his sons from committing evil. God was very angry (see 1 Samuel 2:29-34)! And on the day that Eli died, both his sons Hophni and Phinehas died (1 Samuel 4:16-18).

My husband and I once visited Hildene, the ancestral home of Robert Todd Lincoln, President Lincoln's only son to ever reach the age of maturity. Abraham Lincoln and his wife Mary Todd had four sons, Willie (1850-1862), Robert (1843-1926), Thomas (1853-1871) and Eddie (1846-1850). Only Robert survived. Lincoln was a man of humble origins, born in a log cabin. At an early age, he chose to follow Christ. Lincoln's speeches were often peppered with scripture and a call to the nation to seek God's will. Then things began to change. While at Hildene, I was shocked to hear that there are no direct descendants of Lincoln's family alive today! Like Eli, Lincoln's appeasement toward his family made him a disappointment to God. When he wanted to send one of his sons to fight in the Civil War, Mary refused to allow it. Lincoln told her, "Mother, many poor widows have already lost their only sons in the war. How can I refuse to send mine?" But Mary got her way, and Abraham delayed Robert's entry into the war, although he later joined up in 1864. It was a difficult time for the nation. There was much suffering going on. Many went without needed supplies due to lack of funds. Despite this Mary was always spending money on frivolous things that often went unused. Abraham tried to rein in her spending, but would finally capitulate to her whims. Mary even went so far as to have seances in the White House (see Deuteronomy 18:10-14)! Yet Lincoln never put a stop to it! While a huge statue of Lincoln remains in Washington DC today (Deuteronomy 5:8), God has wiped out every trace of the direct Lincoln family. For history has proven that Abraham Lincoln, one of the greatest Presidents we ever had, put his family before God! Most of us think of Moses as



being one of the greatest men of God. And he was. Yet there was a time when even Moses angered the Lord so much that God nearly killed him! Moses had procrastinated in circumcising his son because his wife, Zipporah, had been against it. But when Zipporah realized that God was about to kill Moses, she "...took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it. 'Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me,' she said" (Exodus 4:25 NIV).

When Eric and I first got married, we attended a church that was really on fire for Christ (Acts 2:2-4). The building they used didn't even have a restroom. But, I could feel the Presence of God there. That church was used by the Lord to bring many souls into His Kingdom. Consequently, the Lord blessed the pastor and he was able to build a much larger church. However, as so often happens when God blesses people, the attitude of the pastor began to change. As pride (Proverbs 16:18) entered his heart, his family began to gain more and more influence over him. His wife was more concerned with her human family than the will of God. I could see the pastor slipping away from Christ. He no longer seemed happy and full of God's Spirit. Before long, the congregation was following his lead. For sheep follow their shepherd (Jeremiah 23:1-2)! By then, I had developed a closer walk with Christ and I did not want to be sucked into the vacuum of worldliness the church had become. So we moved to a different church and eventually started this ministry. A few years later, the beautiful church that God had given him was knocked down completely and became a vacant lot. Later, we found out from a man who used to attend the church, that the pastor had left in disgrace after having an affair with a member of his congregation. And the sheep were scattered (see John 10:12).

In closing, I want to remind you about another terrible stumbling block among believers. "*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs*" (1 Timothy 6:10 NIV). Doctrines like the "Prosperity Gospel" have created an atmosphere of greed among many who were once living solely for Christ. Greed is idolatry because it takes the person's attention away from Christ and puts it on the carnal things of this earth (James 5:1-3). I want to tell you a true story. It is about an evangelist who was trying to raise money for a missionary project. He'd pass around the collection plate at meetings, but what was donated was meager. This happened often. Then one day, he met a young Christian woman who was at one of the meetings. Her and her husband became missionaries in a foreign land up until he died. When she saw the evangelist she said, "I have been wrestling with this for days now. All I have left from my husband is my little gold wedding band. I don't know why the Lord would want it. It's not very valuable, but it means so much to me! Nevertheless, God has told me to give it to you. She took it off and handed it to him. The man told her that he didn't know why God wanted him to have it either, but he took it. Months went by and at each crusade he would put his hand in his pocket and feel the ring. And he would tell the congregation about the young woman and her sacrifice for Christ. Then he would pass around the collection plate. During those months, he raised a lot of money! It was finally enough to build the missionary structure. Then one day he saw the woman again. "I'm going to return this ring to you," he told her. "God used it to bring in the donations I needed and I don't need it anymore." So, "*Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods*" (Psalms 40:4 NIV). "*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths*" (Proverbs 3:5-6 KJV).