



NON-PROFIT



TAX-EXEMPT

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

AUTUMN 2013

FROM US TO YOU

Here we are in Autumn once again. And for us, this year has gone by very fast! Like all true servants of Christ, we have had our ups and downs as the months have passed. After suffering with all kinds of mysterious rashes for decades, Anne finally ended up in the hospital with a serious skin infection for eleven days last March. There she finally met a highly experienced wound doctor who was able to diagnose the problem. It turned out to be a very rare autoimmune disease. So rare in fact, that it may be something totally new. Anne was referred to a highly skilled rheumatologist and, thank the Lord, she is now getting relief from years of torment. Who says Christians never have to suffer with health problems? The prosperity preachers do! So don't believe it (see Daniel 8:27, 2 Kings 13:14, Galatians 4:12-14, Philippians 2:25-27, 1 Timothy 5:23). Do you need encouragement in your trial of faith? Read Psalms chapters 37 and 41. The Bible is filled with examples of godly men and women who have suffered all kinds of ailments yet have kept their faith, love, and devotion in the Lord. And Anne says that, despite everything, she has never been happier or at greater peace and joy than the present time.

There is more good news. Anne's roommate was a very sweet woman in her nineties. After telling Anne that she was afraid to die, Anne led her through the sinner's prayer and she accepted Christ as her Savior. And we know that it must have been sincere because the devil didn't like it at all. For when her relatives found out about it they complained to the hospital authorities. Anne was told not to talk about religion to her anymore. Whatever happened to our Constitutional right of freedom of speech and religion? Well, it didn't matter because Anne was getting out of the hospital that day anyway. And her roommate had already accepted the Lord. And probably just in the nick of time. For just a few hours before she left, Anne's roommate took a turn for the worst. We don't know the outcome, but perhaps the Lord had waited for her to accept Him and was ready now to take her home (John 14:2, 1 Corinthians 2:9, Revelation 21:10 thru 22:5). Eric also has had many health issues. But we know that, in His time, the Lord will heal us of all our ailments. For “...*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few*” (Matthew 9:37 NIV). So keep us in your prayers. Nevertheless, we believe that, for us, the best is yet to come.

Our main article for this issue is “Stumbling Blocks To Faith” and there are many such stumbling blocks in the lives of everyone who wants to live for Christ. Little things that you wouldn't expect can clog up your faith in ways you never would have imagined. So even when things go well in your life, don't make the mistake of thinking that you can just coast along in your walk with the Lord. When God delivered the ancient Hebrews from Egyptian slavery it was a physical example of the spiritual slavery all of us are born into through the first birth (John 8:34, Romans 6:17. Also, see John 1:12-13). Egypt could be a metaphor for the world system, which Satan controls (Matthew 4:8-10, Ephesians 2:1-5, 1 John 2:15-17). The Lord's deliverance from it can be compared to the Born Again (John 3:3) experience where

we are freed from Satan's bondage of sin and are en-route to our Promised Land, Heaven. But notice that the road the Hebrews traveled was not an easy one (compare to Matthew 7:13-14). They struggled through all kinds of hardship including, snake bites, hunger, thirst, and battles with other nations, even the Korah rebellion (see Numbers 16:1-33). From the very beginning their faith was not as it should have been (Exodus 14:10-13).

The sin of the Israelites actually got so bad that “...*the Lord's anger burned against them*” (Numbers 25:3 NIV. Also, see Deuteronomy 32:15-28). Time and again they would enter into the most horrible forms of sin, despite all that the Lord had done for them. And God would become furious and allow the Israelites to suffer all kinds of grief. Then they would realize how low they had sunk, and they would cry out to God and repent of their wickedness. Again and again God would have mercy upon them and forgive them. Slowly life would begin to improve. Then, as God's blessings began to flow once more, they would become complacent and sin would



begin to take hold among them (Jeremiah 7:25-29, 11:7-14, Psalms 78:34-59). Yes, God had once saved them from slavery, just as He has saved those who have repented of their sins and turned away from the wickedness of this world. Yet out of all of those the Lord had rescued from Egypt, only two of the original inhabitants entered into the Promised Land, Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 14:30). Even Moses and Aaron were not considered worthy to enter in (Numbers 27:12-23).

The point is that the Born Again experience delivers you out of the sins of your past, cleans you up and sets you on the right path to Heaven. However, God will never take away your free will. He will never leave you (Hebrews 13:5), if you remain in Him (John

15:1-8). But if you cease to become an obedient lamb (Isaiah 53:6), and stray away from the Shepherd (see Matthew 18:12-14), you put yourself in danger of falling so far away from the Lord that you become easy prey for the wolves (Matthew 7:15 and Acts 20:29-31). It is the end result that gets you to Heaven, not the beginning of the trip. That's why even Paul, the great Apostle, worried that he could lose his own salvation (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). As Peter put it, “...*If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?*” (1 Peter 4:18 NIV). We warn you of the danger of becoming so apathetic in your faith that you take the Lord for granted and become easy prey for the devil (2 Corinthians 4:4). For Satan does not come to you with horns and a tail. Neither do those who spread the poison of false doctrine (Matthew 13:24-30) among God's flock (2 Corinthians 11:13-15. Also, see Jude 1:4-5 and 2 Peter 2:15-22). Therefore, remain in Christ and He will remain in you (1 Peter 5:6-9. Also, see 1 Peter 1:1-9). Know that the Lord loves you. And whatever trials and tribulations come your way, remember that they are the Shepherd's tools, His rod and His staff (see Psalm 23:4), herding you back into the safety of His Holy Kingdom.

In Christ we remain, *Eric and Anne Kaestner*

STUMBLING BLOCKS TO FAITH

By Anne Kaestner

Have you been having a problem with your walk with the Lord lately? Does it seem like something is missing? Were you once feeling so close to Christ that you felt joy and peace in your heart but now it's as if something is blocking your way? That's a familiar problem many Christians go through in their walk with God. I went through it myself back in the 1980's. A stumbling block is some type of idol. I know you might not think of yourself as an idol worshiper. You don't bow down and worship statues (Deuteronomy 5:8). And you go to church regularly. So you consider yourself a Christian. But let me ask you, how is your walk with Jesus Christ? I'm not talking about church attendance or an occasional prayer when you want something. I am referring to a beautiful personal walk with God that goes way beyond fellowship with other believers, Bible study, and even worship. Of course all these are important and I'm not trying to belittle them. But, let me put it this way. Do you consider yourself a Christian because you believe in God? As James put it, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder" (James 2:19 NIV). How about church attendance? Does that make you a Christian? If that is the sum total of your walk with God that still leaves much lacking. There is so much bad doctrine in churches these days (Matthew 7:15 and Acts 20:29-30) that it's like the Apostle Paul prophesied, "...the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-4 NIV).

Many will say, "But you still need worship." Of course you do! But God is not fooled (Proverbs 15:3) by false piety. King Saul considered himself a righteous man because God personally chose him to be king (1 Samuel 9:15-17). At that time he was humble in spirit and loved the Lord (1 Samuel 15:17). But that doesn't mean that Saul remained faithful. God chose Jonah to go on a mission for Him as well. He was hand picked by the Lord. But, as in the case of Saul, Jonah chose to rebel and go off in another direction (Jonah 1:1-3). Just because God chooses someone for a job, doesn't mean that the person will remain faithful. The Lord looks at all the qualifications a person has at the time, and knows that they would be the best choice for the job. "...For many be called, but few chosen" (Matthew 20:16 KJV). Saul was like Cain (Genesis 4:1-12). He wanted to worship God on his own terms, not the way the Lord required. One example is the time that God specifically told Saul, "...Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out" (1 Samuel 15:18 NIV). However, Saul, like Cain, thought he had a better idea. Although he had been told not to take any plunder, Saul disobeyed God. So when Samuel arrived and he saw all the sheep that were supposed to have been destroyed, he became angry. But Saul chose to justify himself in his own eyes. He told Samuel, "...I did obey the LORD... I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal" (1 Samuel 15:20-21 NIV).

Like many believers today, Saul obeyed half of what God told him to do. He slaughtered most of the Amalekites, but saved that which was of material value to himself. Like Eve's forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6), the sheep looked desirable to him. And he was sure they would be tasty to eat. Plus, they were an expensive status symbol. The typical old, "...lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life..."

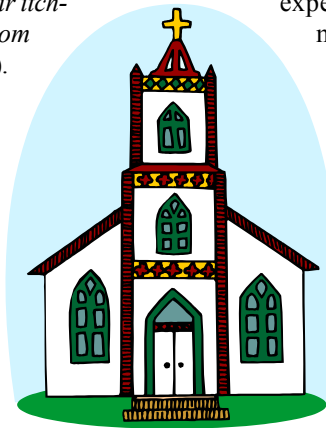
(1 John 2:16 KJV). These three become major stumbling blocks in a believer's walk with God (Matthew 13:22). They make excuses for bad behavior, and rationalize evil deeds. However, from God's perspective, it was bad enough that Saul didn't kill the sheep, but much worse that he chose to offer God a sacrifice that the Lord considered defiled! So, "...Samuel replied: 'Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? **To obey is better than sacrifice...** For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has rejected you as king'" (1 Samuel 15:22-23 NIV). The lesson in this is to remember the words of Christ, "These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men" (Matthew 15:8-9 NIV). So church attendance is not enough. "Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. What kind of house will You build for Me? says the Lord. Or where will My resting place be? Has not My hand made all these things? You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!" (Acts 7:49-51 NIV). God is not interested in how fancy your church is, the stained glass windows, the lovely altar cloth, etc. "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9 NIV). In other words, if you consider yourself a Christian, you should not go to church expecting to find God. The Lord does not haunt buildings

made by men! You should take Him to church with you!

For God lives in the hearts of those who love Him (see 1 Corinthians 6:19)! You need a **personal walk** with the Lord daily in your life! "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7 KJV).

What about prayer? Does praying make you a good Christian? You need to spend time in prayer before the Lord. But if your heart is not right with God, it will be to no avail (Luke 18:10-14). Also, see Galatians 2:6). As the scripture describes, too many Christians tend to take a sneering, condescending attitude toward the worldly folk. Sinful church leaders, seeking to justify their own bad behavior, have taken scripture out of context (see Acts 20:29-30). One of their favorites is a quote from the Lord who said, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matthew 7:1 NIV). They assume Jesus is speaking about the church. But He is not! "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. **For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him**" (John 3:16-17 NIV). Paul knew of this erroneous doctrine regarding Matthew 7:1-2, and he wrote, "I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people--not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. **What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?** God will judge those outside. 'Expel the wicked man from among you'" (1 Corinthians 5:9-13 NIV).

So far we have discussed belief in God, worship, church attendance, prayer. Now what about Bible study? I once heard the late Atheist, Madalyn Murray O'Hair, state during a television interview that she had read the entire Bible from cover to cover. Don't be surprised by this because Satan also knows the Bible very well! He



quoted it to Jesus in Matthew 4:6. Therefore, his followers, who pose as servants of God (2 Corinthians 11:12-15), also know the Bible very well. However scripture tells us, "...the fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God...*" (Psalms 14:1 KJV). And, "*the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...*" (Psalms 111:10 NIV). As for Madalyn Murray O'Hair, she died on September 29, 1995. She had been tortured, murdered, and dismembered! So then, how do you get closer to God? The answer is to stop depending on traditional religious crutches and keep your eyes on Christ! How do you do this? "...*Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh...*" (Galatians 5:16-17 KJV). In other words, don't put anything before Christ in your life! For even that which seems good can become a stumbling block to God! If your life revolves around the church instead of Christ you're not living by faith. Every church in the world claims to be attempting to do the will of God. So then, why are the doctrines they teach all so different? "*The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron*" (1 Timothy 4:1-2 NIV).

Are you happy at the church you go to? Are you convinced that their doctrines are correct? Good! Go where you feel the Lord leading you. But don't allow your church to lull you into a false sense of security (Matthew 7:21-27, Jude 1:4, 1 Peter 5:8). Don't let anyone else do your thinking for you. Make sure that everything you are taught can be backed up by scripture. If it feels like something is wrong, ask where the Bible talks about it. And trust your instincts, if you are led by the Holy Spirit. For Jesus said, "*I am the good shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me*" (John 10:14 NIV). If the person you are listening to is truly filled with God's Spirit, the Lord's Spirit in you will let you know (see 1 Samuel 16:7). So how do you handle it when something seems to be getting in the way of your walk with God? You humbly inquire of the Lord, through prayer and sometimes fasting. The Lord said, "...*I have found David, son of Jesse, a man after My own heart; he will do everything I want him to do*" (Acts 13:22 NIV). What was David's secret? In everything he did, David inquired of the Lord (1 Samuel 23:4, 30:8, 2 Samuel 2:1, 5:19, 5:23, 1 Chronicles 14:10,14)! The illumination of Christ (see John 9:5) will keep you from falling into the many stumbling blocks you know Satan will put in your way. For a stumbling block is a form of idolatry. It's whatever means more to you than the Lord.

Consider what God told Ezekiel, "...*Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of Me at all?...*" (Ezekiel 14:2-5 NIV). Also, see Deuteronomy 32:16-25 & Isaiah 59:1-2). A stumbling block doesn't have to be something bad. It could be that you want your husband or wife to become Born Again (John 3:3). Or perhaps you want the Lord to heal you of an affliction. Or maybe you're not happy with your life and you want God to make certain changes. If any of these things get in the way of your walk with the Lord, they become stumbling blocks. I have heard people say things like, "How can I truly walk with God when my wife is not a Christian?" My husband, Eric, and I have heard this many times from people. And then we found out that the reason why their spouse wasn't a believer was because they have been such a bad example for Christ! I myself went through this years ago. I wanted God to do something for me and I wanted Eric to get closer to the Lord. It turned out that I was the one who was getting in His way. However, once I said to the Lord, "...*not my will, but Yours be done*" (Luke 22:42 NIV) everything changed. I still haven't received what I asked for all these years later. But I relinquished my will to Christ and Eric noticed the difference. He felt such conviction in his heart that he turned to the Lord and



received the Holy Spirit shortly after (Acts 19:1-6). Giving up my desires to God brought me "...*the peace of God, which passeth all understanding... through Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:7 KJV). Also, see John 14:27).

The Apostle Paul suffered a great deal for Christ (2 Corinthians 11:23-31). But, as if that were not enough, God still gave him what Paul referred to as a "thorn in the flesh." Many Christians would have become angry and fallen away from the Lord because of such suffering. But not Paul! He knew the reason for it. So much knowledge and spiritual gifts were given to him that he easily could have become proud, despite all his other afflictions. And pride was the original sin! It's what caused the archangel Lucifer, to sin against God (see Isaiah 14:12-15, Ezekiel 28:12-19). It's what caused Eve to sin against God (Genesis 3:6). And it is what has destroyed the faith of many who once love and served Jesus Christ (Mark 4:17, Luke 8:13, Hebrews 6:4-6, Galatians 5:4, 2 Peter 2:20). So God humbled him even more (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

When we rely on our natural, carnal nature, the Holy Spirit cannot work in us because we're still in the driver's seat. But when we acquiesce to the Lord, stop trying to control our lives, and cease worrying about this and that (Proverbs 3:5-6), we become like children (see Matthew 18:3-4), without "...*the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth...*" (Matthew 13:22 NIV). Incidentally, wealth (James 5:1-3, Proverbs 28:6, 11:4) is another stumbling block to faith! "*And without faith it is impossible to please God...*" (Hebrews 11:6 NIV). Jesus said, "*No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and money*" (Matthew 6:24 NIV)! "*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). However, God is a rewarder of "...*those who earnestly seek Him*" (Hebrews 11:6 NIV). I've heard many people say, "I prayed so hard that God would answer my prayer. But He didn't." So they conclude that He doesn't love them, and they either fell away from Christ, or never came Him in the first place. That's not living by faith! When you're a child, you might want to go and play in the street, but your father, who loves you, tells you not to. At the time, you might think that he is being mean and preventing you from having fun. But when you get older, you learn that he saw the danger there that you didn't see. It's the same way with the child of God. The Lord sees into the future that we cannot see. What's hidden in the human heart is not hidden to Him!

I was born in England. My parents met during the second world war. They married in the United States and were supposed to live here. But money was tight, my mother was only twenty-one at the time, and she didn't want to live with her mother-in-law. So she saved up enough money to go back to England, supposedly to see her family. However, once there, she refused to return to America. My dad loved her enough to go back to England and live with her for nine years, in his mother-in-law's apartment. That was until he heard that his mother had terminal lung cancer, and the doctors told her that she only had six months to two years, at most, to live. My grandmother was a strong Christian woman, and a real prayer warrior. She had traveled to England to see me when I was newborn. And I remained in her prayers from that time on. She wanted my salvation so much that she was willing to accept whatever it took for God to accomplish it. Two years passed and my mother had steadfastly refused to come back to the United States. And my dad was determined not to go back to England. They were almost at the point of divorcing when my mother finally acquiesced. She had hoped that when her mother-in-law died, her husband would return to England. But he was adamant in his refusal. For my

(Continued On Page 4)

grandmother continued to live. She was in terrible pain, and slowly dying, but so thrilled when my mother finally brought me, along with my two siblings, to the United States. We lived in the two family house that grandma owned. She lived upstairs and we lived downstairs. So my mother was frequently opening the vestibule door to visitors from Grandma's church. They would come to pray for her, comfort her, give her holy communion and clean her house. Then one day, two young women and a small group of children about my age, came to sing hymns to her. Sister Sarah was the group leader. Sister Gerta played the piano. So, when Sister Sarah saw me, and my sister, she cajoled my mother into letting us attend her release-time group. Mother asked me if I wanted to go. And I was happy for any excuse to leave school an hour early. Moreover, the church would always send a car to our house to drive us to church and back.

The school year ended and so did release time. Then my mother got a postcard in the mail, inviting my sister and me to attend "Daily Vacation Bible School." Classes would last for two weeks. And I wouldn't be able to sleep late on those days. I did not want to give up two weeks of my vacation to attend church! I cried, I pleaded, but to no avail. This time Mother was adamant! And, like it or not, we ended up going. The two weeks were nearly up when, one afternoon, they gave a last minute altar call. And that's when I accepted Christ as my Savior and Lord! As I knelt there, tears streaming down my cheeks, I felt a comforting hand on my shoulder. Sister Sarah was kneeling beside me, leading me through the sinner's pray. After that I talked my dad into letting me attend Sunday school as well. Again the church sent a car to pick us up. Despite her pain, Grandma was ecstatic when she heard about my salvation! Then one day, I went up to visit her and she was beaming with joy from ear to ear. "God told me that you're going to have a big ministry that will be worldwide, and will change the lives of many people," she told me. Eric and I have had many more prophecies like it since that time. But she was the first to tell me! Despite the prediction of the doctors, Grandma lived with lung cancer for six years before she died. And that was in the days before the type of modern medicine we have today! In her last surgery, the doctors found that she not only had lung cancer, but peritonitis and gangrene as well! She made medical history at the hospital! The doctors were amazed. "...With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26 NIV)!

Stumbling blocks remain in anything that is more important to you than God! That includes family, jobs, human idols of all type, including entertainment, sports, politics, etc. Is your son or daughter more important to you than Christ? Do you allow your child or grandchild to run up and down the church isles during a service or allow your baby or child to scream during the message, distracting others from God's Word? If so, Jesus said you're not a true Christian (Matthew 10:34-38). Does your labor union mean more to you than the Lord? I remember once hearing about a strike by a major union. It went on so long that the members were worried about their finances. A man was interviewed on the evening news. He said, "I went to church last night..." "Good," I thought to myself. He's putting his trust in God and praying about it. Then, to my disappointment, he continued, "And I decided to just trust my union." His faith wasn't in the Lord. He gave lip service (see Matthew 15:8-9) to God at his church but decided to trust in the wisdom of men. "...Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD" (Jeremiah 17:5 NIV. Also, see 1 Corinthians 3:19-20). "...The [human] heart is deceitful above

all things and beyond cure..." (Jeremiah 17:7-10 NIV).

Another stumbling block is race. Have you noticed how ethnic differences create a polarizing effect on people? They tend to defend their own, whether the accused person is guilty or not. The O.J. Simpson trial was a clear example of that. And, more recently, the George Zimmerman trial, which often drew a sharp distinction between racial barriers. Do you automatically jump to the defense of someone or something of yours without concern as to whether it is right or wrong? The old "My dog doesn't bite", syndrome after the dog has attacked someone. As I said previously, I was born in England, and have dual nationality. So I am still a British subject. Even so, my loyalty remains to the truth and fairness of a situation, not to my country of birth. Therefore, I was very disappointed in the British people when, in 1997, an English nanny was put on trial accused of manslaughter in the death of a newborn baby. The thinking of the British public was that she was English, "one of us", so she couldn't possibly be guilty! It's the typical, "they're attacking one of us" emotion that gets in the way of a proper walk with God! The Massachusetts jury found her guilty, even though the British public raised large amounts of money for her defense. Nevertheless, the verdict created such an angry protest in England that the judge set her free! Worse still, the baby's mother, an ophthalmologist, who took time off every day to return home to breast feed her baby, received angry responses from the British. They attacked her for not staying home and raising her two children herself. Frankly, I was disgusted with their narrow minded, prejudicial attitude!

This, "defending my own" syndrome becomes a stumbling block in other ways too. Try to tell a religious person that the doctrines they are being taught are wrong. That "You're attacking my faith" attitude gets in the way every time! They will not care whether you're right or wrong. All they can see is that you're attacking their beliefs. Seventy-eight times Jesus would prefix His statements with the phrase, "I tell you the truth." Jesus said, "...I am the way and the **truth** and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6 NIV). If you are Born Again and filled with God's Spirit (Acts 2:4), your true family are those who are brethren in Christ, from the second birth, not the first (see John 1:12-13, 3:3)! I remember one time when Eric and I were early birds waiting to get into a big Christian crusade. We waited with fellow believers who wanted to get a good seat. There was about fifteen of us. What a wonderful time we had of shared love and testimonies! There were no barriers between us no matter what age, gender, race, or national origin. I casually remarked to my husband that I was getting thirsty. There was a woman standing near us of African American descent. What a beautiful spirit she had in Christ! She didn't care that we are white, and of a different race. We were her brethren in the Lord! She sent her daughter to their car in order to bring back some soda for me. I'll always remembered her kindness. If you claim to love and serve Jesus Christ, but all you can see in a person is the ethnic group they belong to, there is something wrong. There should be only two divisions among us, those who put Christ first, and those who don't!

True Christianity is not a popularity contest! The closer you get to Christ, the more you will be attacked (see Matthew 5:11-12), even from members of your own church (Acts 20:29-30, 2 Timothy 4:9-11, 14-18), even your family (Matthew 10:36)! So if you put Christ first in your life, "*do not be afraid of them; the LORD your God Himself will fight for you*" (Deuteronomy 3:22 NIV). "*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). And "...*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).

