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TAX-EXEMPT

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

December 2023

FROM US TO YOU

It's the Christmas season! It should be a time of joy and merriment. All Christians should be filled with a sense of holy awe and exhilaration as we celebrate the anniversary of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We should meditate on the love God had for all of us sinners that He "...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). However, this year a dark cloud of tension seems to overshadow this world. There are wars going on that affect all of us in some way. Tension abounds in demonstrations and protests that often get chaotic and rowdy, and upset the peace of these holy days. There is no escaping it. The whole world seems to be affected by the demonic spirits that decay and disrupt all that is good. Nevertheless, that which is of God is mightier than our momentary grief. The devil knows that his time of control over this world is slowly running out (Revelation 12:12) and Jesus is coming back as our King and conqueror. Despite the devil's attempt to turn our joy into sadness, if you truly love Christ, *"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world"* (1 John 4:4- NIV).

Unfortunately, many are suffering right now. We, especially, owe a great deal of love and compassion for the Jewish race due to what they are going through right now in prejudice and death threats. Over time, the Jews have born an extra measure of wrath from Satan since their race brought our Savior into this world. Our Holy Bible also came from the Hebrews, both Old Testament and New. We are old enough to remember a time when department stores played Christian Christmas music while people did their holiday shopping. There was more gaiety in the air. (Of course we mean the festive interpretation of the word). We used to be able to turn on the car radio and hear songs like "Holy Night" or "Silent Night" or "Little Town of Bethlehem." These days, if there is any Christmas music, it's more likely about Santa Claus and reindeers. The myth of Santa Claus evolved over many years. It has nothing to do with Christianity! It originally came to America through Dutch Catholic immigrants in what was then called New Amsterdam, but is now called New York. Let the worldly folk (1 John 2:15-17) worship an idol if they choose to do so, even at Christmas. However, we serve the Lord! The love for Christ is in our hearts. Let us spread that love around by showing kindness to those who don't expect it. Let the worldly crowd have their cocktail parties and their rock music. How boring and dead it must feel to live that way! What a difference it makes to really know Christ! To know that God, the Creator of the universe, loved us enough to make such a sacrifice for a world of sinners such as ours.

God the Father and God the Son had such joy working together (Proverbs 8:22-31) making this world perfect for us, Their prized

creation! How dreadful it must have been for Them when mankind sinned against Them! *"The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain"* (Genesis 6:5-6 NIV). God could have wiped mankind out completely. Mankind chose to obey the devil. So God could have sent us all to the place where the devil will spend eternity, in Hell and the Lake of Fire (Matthew 23:33, Revelation 20:10). Most humans don't understand that Hell is a real place that everyone, who is not redeemed through Christ, will go to (Matthew 7:13-14) eternally. The fire that comes out of volcanoes comes from Hell, which is in the center of the earth (Deuteronomy 32:22). Hell is a place that was designed for fallen angels (Matthew 25:41). Mankind was never meant to go there. However, those whose sins are not redeemed will go there. Jesus said, *"...if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.' Everyone will be salted with fire"* (Mark 9:47-49 NIV). It is a place of eternal agony (see Luke 16:24).



God knew we could never pay for our own sin. Only Christ was righteous enough to die in our place! So God the Father felt such compassion for the lost human race that He was willing to allow His only Son, that He loved beyond words, to pay that price for us. And God the Son, Jesus Christ, was willing to leave the glories of Heaven, live among us, and allow humans, His own creation, to punch Him in the face (see John 19:1-3), whip Him 39 times, as was the custom, mocked Him, strip Him, and nail Him to a cross. And He did it for you, and us, because He loves us humans so much! *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him!"* (Romans 5:6-9 NIV).

God the Son knew ahead of time how much He would suffer for us (Isaiah 53:1-12 and Psalms 22:1-18). Was He afraid? *"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear... We love because He first loved us"* (1 John 4:18-19 NIV). You would think that there would be sadness in Heaven when Jesus left His beloved Father to live among us and die such a horrible death. Quite the opposite. There was celebration in Heaven! The angels even brought their joy to a bunch of Shepherds (Luke 2:8-16). Humans would have a chance to avoid an eternity in hell! Jesus was willing to pay the price of redemption for us. Hallelujah! So join us this Christmas in praising God our Holy Lord because He is worthy!

Merry Christmas to all, love, *Eric and Anne Kaestner*

Catholicism Versus the Bible

By Anne Kaestner

Before I go any further, I want to state categorically that there are no perfect religions. That's because there are no perfect people (Romans 3:23). Religion is not the answer to a person's walk with God. Christ is the only way to Heaven (1 Timothy 2:5). Religion is man's attempt to reach God, the human way. A personal relationship with Jesus Christ, through repentance and salvation is God's way (Matthew 4:17, John 14:6). Religion is the problem. Mankind has always sought another way of getting to Heaven, through good works, and sacrifice. Yet as King David prayed to God in repentance after his adulterous affair with Bathsheba, *"You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise"* (Psalms 51:16-17 NIV). The sentiment is the same in this parable that Jesus told us. *"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 'I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted'"* (Luke 18:10-14 NIV).

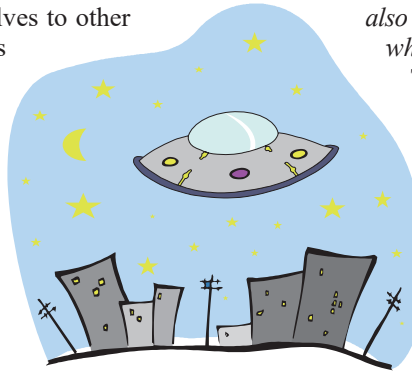
You see, we humans tend to compare ourselves to other humans when we should be comparing ourselves to Christ. Therefore, we don't realize how evil we are from God's perspective. Our sin is so repugnant to God that no amount of good works will pay for it. Only Jesus Christ is holy enough to take our punishment upon Himself and pay for our sins. To those who have repented of their sin and accepted Christ as their Savior, the Bible says, *"...it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV). All the good works and sacrifice in the world will never erase your sin or pay for your salvation. If it did, there would not have been a need for God's Son, Jesus Christ, to come into this world and suffer the agony of crucifixion and die for us. Jesus prayed to His Father shortly before His arrest, *"Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."* An angel from Heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him. And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:42-44 NIV). However, there was **no other way** and Jesus knew it. Only He, Jesus Christ, was righteous enough to die in our place and pay for our sins!

I remember once feeling such pain in trying to achieve a goal that, when I was finally finished, I looked in a mirror and saw tiny red blood vessels all over my face. They didn't burst in my case. However, I can imagine the emotional and physical agony Jesus must have been in for them to burst. Heaven or Hell for billions of people forever were at stake! This world has fallen so far away from the light of Christ that it doesn't have enough illumination to see how far it has fallen! At Christmastime there is gaiety in the air and a festive feel of material gain, gifts, fancy food, and a party atmosphere. But most people don't realize the danger mankind is in! Have you noticed all the talk about extra terrestrial beings from other planets and UFO's lately? Satan is trying to find a way to explain the disappearance of thousands of people from the earth when Jesus comes back for His children (John 1:12-13) at the time of the Rapture of

the church (1 Corinthians 15:48-54, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-19).

As far as all the talk about UFO's is concerned, the Bible tells us that such conversation would occur in the last days before the Lord's return. After the Rapture Satan will create even greater havoc on the earth. Then the Antichrist will be revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8) along with his false prophet. *"The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness"* (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 NIV). In other words, God is saying that if you would rather believe a lie than the truth, He will not try to stop you. Satan will be allowed to perform all kinds of magic and seemingly impossible feats through his future false prophet (Revelation 19:20), in order to deceive those who stubbornly refuse to believe the truth.

Paul, speaking of modern day false prophets, said *"they are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth—men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected"* (2 Timothy 3:6-8 NIV). In Paul's day, they didn't have television or social media. These days false prophets can come right into your home through these means. Jannes and Jambres were Pharaoh's magicians who used Satan's powerful occult abilities to oppose Moses (Exodus 8:1-7). The same devil and demons exist today and will give the coming false prophet strong mystical powers. The Apostle Paul prophesied of these current last days to Timothy, a young evangelist, *"...There will be terrible times in the last days. People will*



be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them" (2 Timothy 3:1-5 NIV). Doesn't it sound like the way some, even the church, behave today? Those closer to Christ will be able to see how far mankind has fallen from the light of God (John 8:12). The "Power" of God is the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13). Godliness without the Holy Spirit anointing is not godliness at all. It's phony because it's controlled by mankind instead of being controlled by God! *"Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a 'fool' so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: 'He catches the wise in their craftiness;' and again, 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile'"* (1 Corinthians 3:18-20 NIV). That is those that the world **thinks** are wise.

Jesus said of the religious leaders in His day, *"...Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: '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.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men"* (Mark 7:6-8 NIV). The same thing is happening these days in Christian churches! That's why there are so many dif-

ferent denominations in Protestant churches and why the Catholic Church has lost so many of its parishioners. I have previously spoken a great deal about erroneous Protestant doctrines such as “name it and claim it” the “kings kid doctrine,” and a “positive mental attitude.” Man-made doctrines and religious presumption in the church have led millions of people to Hell since the days of the early church. However, there are thousands of sincere Catholic men and woman that want so much to please God. Yet their faith has been stifled by man-made church doctrines they have been led to believe have some basis in truth, when they do not.

My Mother-in-law, Geraldine Kaestner died in 1998. She was 89 years old. We had a small wake for her, and some of her neighbors attended. One of them was a Catholic woman named Nancy. To my surprise, she brought with her a card from her church. I do not remember the exact wording, but the gist of it stated that she had paid a certain amount of money to her church on Gerry’s behalf so that they would pray for her, and she would have an easier time getting into Heaven. The fact is that I had led Gerry though the sinner’s prayer just a few days before she died. She admitted that she was a sinner and repented of it, and she had accepted Christ as her Lord and Savior. So she was already in Heaven anyway! The prayers of the Catholic Church had nothing to do with it! I had thought that the Catholic Church stopped that practice a long ago. But I was wrong. Sadly, they were still selling indulgences! It was a major cause of the Protestant Reformation (1517-1648)!

In those days, only the Catholic theologians were educated enough to read the Bible for themselves. The people were just told to believe what the church told them without question. The public was told that when they die, they would go to a place called Purgatory. It was taught that it is a place of limited suffering that is not as bad as Hell. And, according to Catholic doctrine, each soul has to pay for their own sins by doing good works until they are righteous enough to get into Heaven. Don’t believe it! The word “Purgatory” isn’t even in the Bible! It’s a bold faced lie, and it is exactly contrary to the teaching of the Bible, which says, “...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). “Jesus answered, **‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’**” (John 14:6 NIV).

The whole doctrine of Purgatory was invented by two Popes, Pascal I (817-824) and John VIII (872-882). It was found to be a very profitable way of bringing money into the church. In fact, the church in those days, had fallen so far into apostasy that many theologians had become alarmed at the sharp distinction between church practices and doctrines when compared to those of the Bible. The protests had to come from religious leaders because the common people didn’t know how to read or write in their native language. Obviously, they knew even less about Latin, the language of the church! Therefore, it took theologians and Bible scholars, to delve into the ancient scriptures in order to determine how far the church had fallen from the light and love (see John 3:16) of God. The leaders of these protests often became martyrs at the hands of ruthless church leaders who didn’t want anyone questioning **their** spiritual authority over the people. Many of them died horrible deaths. Often they were burned at the stake. This had been going on for centuries, and Christians today, who take their faith so lightly, have no conception of the cost in blood, suffering, and captivity that our forefathers bore for us in order to contend for the purity of the faith! John Huss, John Wycliffe, John Bunyon, William Tyndale, Michael and Margaretha Sattler

(founders of the Anabaptist movement), and so many others, paid a debt of faith to God that goes beyond words. Many of them were martyred. They made a mark on the Christian faith that should never be forgotten!

Out of all the protest leaders against the Catholic Church, none is more well known than Martin Luther (1483-1586). He was born of poor parents but entered the University of Erfurt, Germany in 1501. He originally planned to study law, but in 1505 he suddenly decided to enter a monastery. He became a monk and practiced all forms of fastings and scourgings. He wrote later that for two years he had endured “such anguish as no pen can describe.” Then, one day, in 1508, while reading St. Paul’s epistle to the Roman church, his eyes fell on a line of scripture that revolutionized his life forever, “*For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, **The just shall live by faith***” (Romans 1:17 KJV. Also, see Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38). This conflicted with the church’s practice of selling indulgences. Parishioners were told that if they gave enough money to the church, they wouldn’t have to spend as long in Purgatory. Pope Sixtus IV (1476) became the first to sell indulgences for loved ones who had already died, and were said to be in Purgatory. In 1517, John Tetzel came through Germany selling certificates, signed by the Pope, and offering repentance, penance, or absolution by the priest (Mark 2:6-11). It was recorded that he said to the people, “as soon as your coin clinks in the chest the souls of your friends will rise out of Purgatory into Heaven.”

This flew in the face of the scripture that Luther had read, and as



he began to delve more deeply into the Bible he became so inflamed at the hypocrisy (Matthew 15:7-9, 16:3, and 22:18) of the church that he drew up a list of 95 Theses. Nearly all of them had to do with the selling of indulgences, and really only stated that he was willing to discuss the matter at the university. However, printed copies of his Theses were quickly distributed, and it became “the spark that set Europe aflame.” Luther’s followers began to join the long history of protestants against the church and therefore, the movement became known as Protestant. How sad it is today that Satan has once again influenced so much of the church to the point that

Christianity has become a cheap marketing strategy!

Back in the days of the early church, Christians were greatly persecuted for their faith. The Roman Empire controlled most of the known world in those days. And their ruler, Caesar, was to be worshiped as a god. As a result, Christians were horribly put to death, or afflicted for their faith, when their allegiance was tested, and they chose Christ instead of Caesar to worship. Thousands were crucified, fed to lions, burned at the stake, or otherwise tortured to death. This went on for centuries until the time of Caesar Constantine. Constantine had a problem. His empire was split. Despite all the persecution Rome had caused, Christianity had spread like wildfire and Christians would not give up their faith regardless of the consequences. The idol worshipers were stubborn too. They would not give up their idols to worship Christ. It became an obstacle to Constantine’s authority. The Roman Empire had lasted for centuries, but now it was divided from within.

Constantine finally came up with a solution, compromise! Half of his empire wanted idols to worship, so why not give them new idols? Why couldn’t the disciples, and other Bible characters, become idols? The Bible already called them “saints” (Acts 9:13). And for those who preferred to worship a mother type image, how about Mary? She was the mother of baby Jesus, who is God the Son. Therefore, it was easy to present her to the idol worshipers as the “mother of God.” Consequently, it would be easy to **(Continued on Page 4)**

make her equal to God. It worked. The people accepted Mary as deity. No one seemed to dwell on the obvious question, “If Mary gave birth to God, who gave birth to Mary?” According to Apocryphal writings, Mary’s birth parents were named Joachim and Anne. The story behind this apparently comes from writings known as the Proto-evangelium of James the Lesser that was written by an unknown author. It is **not** deemed part of the canon of the Catholic or Protestant church. The truth is the Bible does not provide any information about them. However, it is clear that she was a normal, virginal, Jewish maiden. Isaiah prophesied about her. He wrote, “*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel*” (Isaiah 7:14 NIV).

Scripture implies that Mary was born though normal Jewish parents. So how did she become deity? She didn’t! The Bible conflicts with that teaching. “*For there are **three** that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one*” (1 John 5:7 KJV). So Deity, it tells us, is limited to three individuals, God the Father, the Holy Ghost, and the “Word.” The Holy Ghost is referred to as the Holy Spirit in the modern language translations, such as the New International Version. So who is the Word? “*In the beginning was the **Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word **was** God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men*” (John 1:1-4 NIV). Then let’s go down a little further in the chapter. “*He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to **become** children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. The Word became **flesh** and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:10-14 NIV). His name is Jesus Christ. It is He who was rejected by His own Jewish race, but became the one and only Savior for all who repent of their sins, change directions with God’s help, and accept Him as their Lord and Master! Another Catholic doctrine is that of praying to the saints. However, Jesus told us to whom we must pray. “*This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our **Father in heaven**, hallowed be Your name*’” (Matthew 6:9 NIV).

Constantine decided that it was to his advantage to “become” a Christian himself, although there was no evidence of any repentance, humility, or a changed heart. He stopped persecuting the church and began building great churches for his people. He patterned it all after the Roman Empire. That’s why church leaders wear robes similar to Roman attire. Constantine, not God, made all the decisions regarding the church. The church leaders were to be called “priests,” as the Bible describes high religious leaders in the Old Testament (Leviticus 1:5). And, contrary to Bible teaching, the people were told that the priests had the power to forgive sin. Therefore, people were told to make their confessions to the priests, even though the Bible tells us to repent of our sins to God alone (Luke 15:7-10). The hypocritical religious leaders in the days of Christ did not believe Jesus was God the Son. Therefore, they gave Him a hard time for forgiving sin. “*The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, ‘Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? **Who can forgive sins but God alone?**’*” (Luke 5:21 NIV).



However, Jesus spoke to His disciples [who were “Born Again” (John 3:3)] about the religious leaders in His day, saying, “*Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi.’ But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And **do not** call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and He is in Heaven*” (Matthew 23:5-9 NIV)! According to the Catholic Church, the people were also told to call the priests “father.” And the way that Constantine’s church was set up, the term “Holy Father,” was **not** reserved for God alone. Instead, it was given to the head of the Catholic Church, the Pope! Again, I remind you, no church or religion can save you from your sins. Only Christ can do that! And it’s only if you humbly come to **God alone**, repenting of your sins, asking His forgiveness, and desiring, with His help, to change the direction of your life.

All of the apostles were worried about false prophets and false doctrines creeping into the church. Paul told the leaders at the church he had started in Ephesus, “*For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood. 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 20:27-32 NIV). This sounds a lot like the words of Jesus, who said, “*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?*” (Matthew 7:15-16 NIV).

Moreover, my favorite apostle, Simon Peter, put it this way, “*...There were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have **made up**. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping*” (2 Peter 2:1-3 NIV). “*They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—a beast without speech—who spoke with a man’s voice and restrained the prophet’s madness. These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning*” (2 Peter 2:15-20 NIV).

REFERENCE MATERIAL USED:

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