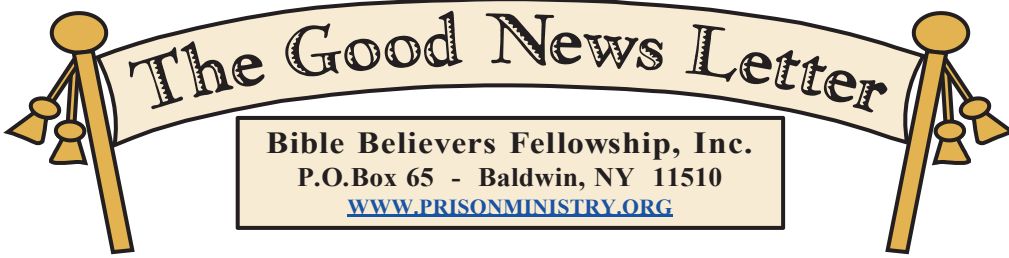




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TAX-EXEMPT

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

December 2024

FROM US TO YOU

It's Christmas time already, the time of the year that we Christians celebrate God's greatest gift to us, the gift of a little baby boy, named Jesus, God's own son. That baby came into this world as a gift of love from God to the whole human race. It was God's greatest sacrifice for us, His human creation. For whether we know it or not, we are all born into this world with a spiritual disease called sin. That's why this world is so evil. Sin is not in the plants or animals. It is in the human heart. It's a terminal disease that dooms us to die physically in our sins and eternally in a state of separation from our Creator, God, who loves us. The Bible says, *"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"* (Isaiah 53:6 NIV). Our Creator never made us in this sinful condition. He is full of love and compassion (see 1 John 4:8). God loved us before we were even created. He made mankind perfect and gave us a perfect world to live in (Genesis 1:31). God wanted children, a race of humans that He could relate to on an intellectual and emotional basis. Therefore, we were given the power of choice, to do good or bad. We were not made to be slaves to God. The Lord already had angels to be His servants. God wanted His human creation to love Him, not because we were programmed to, like robots, or androids, but because He is worthy.

Adam was the first man of God's human creation. He was the prototype for us all. God put within his loins the seed of procreation. Adam's wife, Eve, was to be the means of bringing the next generation into this world. You've probably heard about the decision Adam and Eve made to rebel against God, their Creator, by eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:1-23). That rebellion brought the disease of sin into this world. Therefore, since all of Adam's offspring would be born with Adam's seed within them, all of us were born separated from God. Therefore, since we were created as eternal creatures, we will never cease to exist. Eventually our bodies die, but our souls and spirits leave our human body. And, since we are separated from God, due to our sin, our only destination is a terrible place that was created for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41), called Hell (Matthew 18:9), and then the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14). It is an eternal location in the center of the earth. There are no words adequate enough to describe the torment and misery that awaits those who go there.

However, God had compassion on us humans. Our sin had to be paid for, and we are unable to pay for it (Romans 3:10). Therefore, we became slaves of the devil (Romans 6:16). Only Christ, God's only Son, is perfect enough to pay for our sin and redeem us back to God. *"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). And God's only

Son, the Son who God loves, was willing to leave the glories of Heaven and come into this sinful world to pay for our sin and to redeem us back to God. His name is Jesus Christ, and He took our punishment for us. He was the maker of Heaven and Earth (John 1:1-4), yet He suffered such agony for us (Psalm 22, Mark 15:34), caused by the humans He Himself created (John 1:3-4). God the Father was the Architect.

Both God the Father and God the Son had such joy preparing a perfect world for us. Before He came into this world as Jesus Christ, God the Son spoke of the joy They had together, preparing a new world for us. He said, *"The LORD brought Me forth as the first of His works, before His deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began. When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before He made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world. I was there when He set the heavens in place, when He marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when He established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when He gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep His command, and when He marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was the craftsman at His side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in His presence, rejoicing in His whole world and delighting in mankind"* (Proverbs 8:22-31 NIV).



Mankind wasn't even created yet, but God was filled with joy and anticipation hoping we would love Him because He loves us so much. Even when man sinned, God was willing to sacrifice His own Son for us. God's Son was willing to pay the debt to redeem us (1 Tim. 2:5). When Jesus was first born, all Heaven was filled with joy. For there was a way to restore us to God. Even the angels were joyful! A group of shepherds were guarding their sheep by night. *"An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that... a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. ... You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests'"* (Luke 2:9-14 NIV). All you have to do is repent of your sins and God will do the rest. That's why we celebrate Christmas. Hallelujah, praise God! Praise His Holy name!

If you're an American you have something else to be joyful about this Christmas, the re-election of Donald J. Trump as President! God has given us a fresh new start as a nation. And we must pray for Trump that, with Trump's help, God will wash away all the evil past, and bring back the good like new!

With Christmas blessings everyone, *Eric and Anne Kaestner*

What is a Christian?

By Anne Kaestner

What is a Christian? You hear the term all the time, especially during the Christmas season. There are people in nations all around the world who call themselves “Christians.” However, have you ever really asked yourself, “What does it mean?” This is not a trivial question. The Bible says that most of the people using the term are **not** true Christians at all (Matthew 7:13-14). They just give God lip service, or are deceived by erroneous church doctrine. When speaking to phony religious leaders in His day, Jesus was very blunt. He said, “*You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘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 15:7-9 NIV). Jesus and His apostles warned the people about hypocritical religious leaders (Matthew 7:15, Acts 20:29). Jesus told us that they would be especially abundant in these last days before the Lord’s return (see Matthew 24:5). What does the Bible say? “*...Certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord*” (Jude 1:4 NIV).

Some of them were saved originally (John 3:3), but, sadly, they backslid when they were tempted with wealth and fame (1 Timothy 1:19-20, 2 Timothy 4:14). There is a lot of misunderstanding regarding backsliding. Some preachers teach that once you’re saved it’s

permanent, and you can’t lose your salvation no matter what. Jude goes on to discuss other individuals who felt that their relationship with God was safe, when it wasn’t. He mentioned the Hebrews that God delivered safely out of the slavery of Egypt, but they backslid so much that none of them made it to the Promised Land (symbolic of Heaven), except Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 32:11-12) and the next generation. “*...Joshua said, ‘You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD.’ ‘Yes, we are witnesses,’ they replied. ‘Now then,’ said Joshua, ‘throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.’ And the people said to Joshua, ‘We will serve the LORD our God and obey Him’*” (Joshua 24:22-24 NIV). However, many of them backslid away from Him and made God angry (Deuteronomy 32:19-24).

Jude wanted to remind Christians about the Jews who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah, who thought they were safe because they were Jews, God’s chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6). However, God was so angry at their sin that He destroyed them all (Genesis 19:25). And what about those who lived before the flood? Only Noah and his family were saved (Genesis 7:19-21). And remember the Holy angels of God, who joined Satan in a mutiny against God (Revelation 12:7-9). The Bible tells us that they will end up in Hell and the Lake of Fire (see Matthew 25:41). The point is that too many church going Christians think that they can take their faith lightly, and live a worldly life because they were once “saved” (Isaiah 30:15). I had a disagreement with a religious leader one time. He insisted that once you are saved, you are going to go to Heaven no matter what. He quoted the scripture, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV). I agreed with him. I was quite familiar with the scripture.

However, it specifically says, “*...the old has gone...*” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV). Salvation covers all **past** sins that you repent of. It doesn’t mean you can live like the devil and still get to Heaven. 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” (John 15:4 NIV). The Jews declared their faithfulness to God in Joshua 24:22-24, but years later, they began to sin against God. “*Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. And because the Israelites forsook the LORD and no longer served Him, He became angry with them. He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites, who that year shattered and crushed them. For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites. The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah, Benjamin and the house of Ephraim; and Israel was in great distress*” (Judges 10:6-9 NIV).

Wouldn’t you be angry if you had someone you loved dearly, who you had helped and encouraged, and made strong and powerful, if that person later betrayed you, stopped listening to you, and started obeying your enemies instead. God has feelings, just like we do (see Genesis 6:5-6). We were made in His image (Genesis 1:27), with His emotions, but, sadly, we became sinful as a result of Adam’s sin (Genesis 3:6). I fully understand why God was so angry. Why should He continue to love and help those who so easily betray Him? Their actions prove they don’t really love Him. Then, when they were

really in trouble for sinning against Him, the Israelites began to realize how stupid they had been, and prayed that God would help them. God said “*‘But you have forsaken Me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!’ But the Israelites said to the LORD, ‘We have sinned. Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now’*” (Judges 10:13-15 NIV).

The writer of Hebrews in the New Testament, warned against backsliding. He said, “*It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace*” (Hebrews 6:4-6 NIV). I don’t want to confuse you. He’s not speaking about ordinary backsliding, although that is very dangerous spiritually (Matthew 16:26)! Let me give you an example of what I am teaching. King David was a man of deep faith. He was a much loved servant of God who had been greatly blessed by the Lord. God even gave him the ability to kill the giant, Goliath (see 1 Samuel 17:4-51) when he was still a very young man. Yet in his latter years, David committed a selfish, adulterous act (Exodus 20:17) in his affair with Bathsheba. It led to murder (2 Samuel 11:14-17). And many innocent people suffered for it (2 Samuel 12:11-14, 24:10-17). Nevertheless, when he realized the gravity of what he had done, King David humbly repented of his sin (Psalm 51:1-19) and God forgave him.

The writer of Hebrews, in Hebrews 6:4-6, was talking about the type of backsliding King Saul did. Saul started out as a humble young man originally (1 Samuel 9:21). God blessed Saul and made him king. King Saul was anointed with the Holy Spirit (1 Samuel 10:1). Then, after awhile, Saul started to backslide. He fell right into the devil’s trap and lost interest in righteousness. He became more invested in the carnal world, and he became jealous of David when the



people of his kingdom began to praise David for the success he had achieved on the battlefield (1 Samuel 18:7). Eventually King Saul's backsliding became so defiant that God's Spirit left him and an evil spirit came upon him (1 Samuel 16:14-15). And Saul's jealousy of David became so much a part of his nature that he began to pursue David in order to kill him. But God protected David.

"Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritualists from the land. The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all the Israelites and set up camp at Gilboa" (1 Samuel 28:3-4 NIV). By now God was so disappointed with Saul that He had stopped helping him. Saul knew he was in trouble. He eventually became so desperate that he sought out the prophet Samuel, though dead, to advise him what to do. He should have repented of his sin to God, but he was too proud to do that. Instead, he went in the other direction and his fear and rebellion got worse. It seems backsliders get to a place that is like a spiritual fork in the road. They either repent of their sins like David did, or they become more proud and defiant toward God and others, and fall deeper into sin.

Back in the days when he was righteous, Saul had killed all those who practiced magic arts (Revelation 21:8). But now that He had become God's enemy, he had no one to turn to. The Philistines were still a threat to Israel. Eventually, he became desperate enough to seek out the services of a witch (Micah 5:12).

"Saul swore to her by the LORD, 'As surely as the LORD lives, you will not be punished for this.' Then the woman asked, 'Whom shall I bring up for you?'"

'Bring up Samuel,' he said. When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, 'Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!' The king said to her, 'Don't be afraid. What do you see?' The woman said, 'I see a spirit coming up out of the ground'"

(1 Samuel 28:10-13 NIV). Samuel came up out of the ground, but he had not been in Hell. The righteous who died in those days went to a place called Paradise (see Luke 23:43) because Jesus had not paid for our sins yet. It was next to Hell, but a much more pleasant place to be (Luke 16:19-31).

In fact, Samuel was annoyed that Saul had committed this sin and disturbed him. Apparently God was so angry with Saul that He had allowed this so that Samuel could bring Saul a message. "Samuel said to Saul, 'Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?' 'I am in great distress,' Saul said. 'The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do'" (1 Samuel 28:15 NIV). [Before I go any further, this is just a warning. Don't you ever get involved with witchcraft, a sorcerer, a séance, or any type of occult act, even hypnosis. It is a great sin in the eyes of God (Revelation 21:8).] "Samuel said, 'Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has turned away from you and become your enemy? The LORD has done what he predicted through me. The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David. Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out His fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today. The LORD will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be **with me**. The LORD will also hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines'" (1 Samuel 28:16-19 NIV). Jesus told us that Hell was next to Paradise, so they can see each other, but are separated by a gulf (Luke 16:19-26).

So make sure that the person you are listening to regarding your

walk with God, is faithful to the Lord and teaches you through the Holy Spirit within him or her (John 14:16-19, 15:26, Act 2:1-4, and 19:1-7). Because there are a lot of church leaders who don't know the Lord. The Apostle Peter, says that the Apostle Paul, "...writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people **distort**, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen" (2 Peter 3:16-18 NIV). So be aware that Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:21-23 NIV).

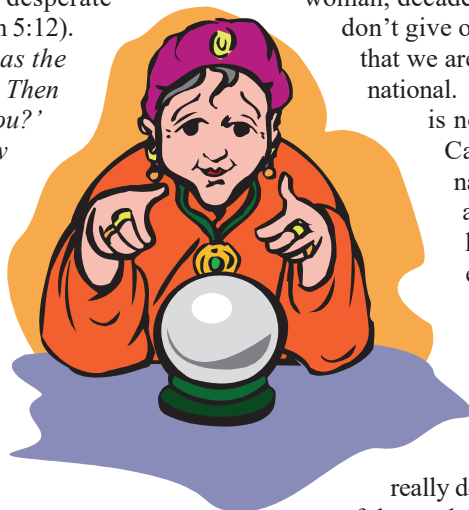
There are so many different Protestant denominations that call themselves "Christian" that there are differences of opinion on the subject. Each denomination has its own set of doctrines that are often opposed to others, but the basics are generally the same. One woman, decades ago, wrote us an angry letter, furious that we don't give out rosary beads to the prison inmates. She said that we are hypocrites because we say we are nondenominational. But she was very wrong (Matthew 6:7-8)! There is nothing in the Bible about prayer beads. It is a Catholic doctrine. Catholicism is not a denomination. It's a religion! After the teachings of Christ and His apostles began to spread throughout the known world of its day, the Roman Empire did everything it could to stop it. Caesar was king as far as the Roman Empire was concerned and there was no other. He was to be worshiped as a god. There were many gods worshiped by the Romans, however Christ was not to be considered one of them (see 1 Timothy 2:5).

Spiritually speaking, the so-called "gods" were really demons appointed to rule over certain jurisdictions of the earth by Satan, the spiritual ruler of this world (Ephesians 2:2). That's why the idol worshipers "...sacrificed to demons, which are not God..." (Deuteronomy 32:17 NIV).

Emperor Constantine wanted to unite the Roman Empire, and so he stopped crucifying the Christians and took aspects of their teaching and added it to pagan doctrines. He built great Cathedrals and chose men to be religious leaders. God didn't choose the leaders, Constantine did! He changed basic teachings of the Bible. Then he claimed he had become a Christian himself. His church began the Roman Catholic religion. Then between the 16th and 17th century Catholic Theologians began to read the Bible themselves and that began the Protestant Reformation in Europe. The Catholic Church fought against it and thousands of Protestant Christians were tortured to death or burned at the stake. The doctrine of Purgatory was established during those days to raise money for the Catholic Church. There is no Purgatory. It is against the teaching of Christ and His apostles. True Christians today owe a great deal to those devout martyrs who suffered so much to preserve our faith!

God created this world originally (Genesis 1:1) and placed humans into it starting with Adam and Eve. His intention was that we humans would form couples, male and female, and have children through the seed of the male. The seed would grow in the body of the female, be born as a child, and the couple would become a family. The family units would grow faithful

(Continued on Page 4)



to their Creator, in the love and blessings of God. And Adam would rule over them, as God's liaison to mankind. Sadly, that didn't happen! God had not wanted to make humans as a race of androids, or robots that have to be programmed because they can't think for themselves. God wanted children, a race of intelligent beings who would love and serve Him, not because they were programmed to, but because He is worthy. So our Creator gave us freedom of choice, to know the difference between good and bad, to obey God, or to rebel against Him.

This created a serious danger because it gave mankind the opportunity to rebel against Him. This would make humans sinful and God cannot live with anyone sinful. So we would not be able to be His children, which was against His intention. Sin had never existed until the time of the angelic rebellion against God. Long before mankind was created God had made a large population of angels to assist Him with His affairs in Heaven and beyond. God had also given the angels freedom of choice, as He would later give mankind. All was going well for a long time. All the angels obeyed Him. Then something happened. *"And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him"* (Revelation 12:7-9 NIV).

The rebellion had been started by a very much blessed and powerful angel named Lucifer. His name meant "light bearer" or "Son of the morning" or "morning star." God had granted Lucifer many blessings. However, as it is so often with humans, the more he was given, the more he wanted. Eventually, he was not satisfied with the blessings God had given him. He wanted what God had as well! So he organized a mutiny against God to take over heaven. *"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit"* (Isaiah 14:12-15 KJV). However, only a third of God's angels could be influenced by Lucifer. Angels are sometimes referred to as "stars" in the Bible (Job 38:7), and scripture says *"His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth..."* (Revelation 12:4 NIV). Nevertheless, Lucifer went ahead with his mutiny. However, like the scripture says, *"...he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven..."* (Revelation 12:8-9 NIV). Consequently, they were thrown out of Heaven, to the Earth.

The earth in those days was not the same beautiful planet that God created for mankind. It was quite different. Scientists say that the Earth is millions of years old and, at one time, had huge dinosaurs and other scary animals living on it. We don't know what condition the planet was in when Lucifer and his rebellious angels lived here. However, God's punishment of Lucifer and his fallen angels was not over yet. Lucifer's name was changed as well, and he was no longer worthy of such a prestigious title. God changed his name to Satan. And his position was changed from "anointed cherub," which he had been (Ezekiel 28:14), to that of "the devil." The position of his angels was changed to "demons" and the devil

and his demons were put on trial in Heaven. God destroyed their physical bodies at that time, and they became "demon spirits."

God said to Satan, *"You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones"* (Ezekiel 28:15-16 NIV). Satan's primary sin was caused by his pride. All other sins resulted from it. In Heaven, because he had done such a good job serving God originally, the Lord had given him many blessings. Apparently he was very vain about his appearance too. God said to him, *"Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings. By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching"* (Ezekiel 28:17-18 NIV).

Their "sanctuaries" were their bodies, which should have been full of the holiness of God. Instead, they were filled with evil thoughts and deceit. So God cremated them while they stood before Him. However, they were created as eternal creatures, and would never cease to exist, the same way God created mankind. Therefore, a permanent prison would have to be prepared for them. They could



not die, because they were already dead. Separation from God is spiritual death (Romans 8:6, Matthew 8:22). Their hearts were not right with God, so it was spiritual death. When the spirit leaves the body it is only physical death. God was planning on remaking the Earth for us, and so it was God's plan that Satan and his demons could not stay **on** the Earth with us, or they would louse things up for us, the way they eventually did! Therefore, Hell was created for them as a temporary holding area or jail, until their final judgment was given (Matthew 25:41) and they would be thrown into the Lake of Fire (see Revelation 20:10). Then, they would exist **not on** the Earth, but **in** it. Every time we

see a volcano erupt, or an earthquake happens, we see some of the Lake of Fire come up from the center of the earth to the surface of the earth.

However, mankind would have to be tested. It was decided that the punishment of Satan and his angels would have to be delayed until our Lord was satisfied with the outcome. Sadly, the worst possible thing happened! God's prized creation followed Satan and his demons into rebellion (Genesis 3:1-6). We humans were born through the seed of Adam, and we inherited the disease of sin. The souls of mankind would have to be redeemed. Our situation was nearly hopeless. However, *"...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). God's Son, who actually built this earth, put the stars and planets in the sky, and created mankind (see John 1:1-3), suffered, and died in our place. He was punched, spit upon (Matthew 26:67-68), whipped (Matthew 27:26), humiliated (Matthew 27:28-29), and crucified (Matthew 27:26) for our salvation. A Christian is someone who repents of his sin and truly loves and serves God through His Son, Jesus Christ. This Christmas let us remember the birth of our precious Savior and how much God did for us (1 Peter 1:18)! Let us not be distracted by all the parties, presents, toys, and decorations. In this material, sinful world we live in, let us remember what God gave us, His one and only Son, the greatest gift of all!