



NON-PROFIT



TAX-EXEMPT

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

June 2018

## FROM US TO YOU

Many Christians are troubled these days. The pain could be physical, emotional, family, career, financial, or some temptation they are suffering with. If you are among them, perhaps you think that God has abandoned you. Often people feel that way if there is sin in their life and they think God is angry at them. In reality, if you don't feel that closeness anymore, you need to know that there is nothing Christ wants more than reconciliation with you, because He loves you!

One of the most poignant parables of Jesus is when the Lord portrays Himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-14). And He said, “...If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in Heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost” (Matthew 18:12-14 NIV). So faith in Christ is dependency upon Him, knowing that He is always there for us to call upon when we belong to His sheepfold. And that kind of faith doesn't come easily. For in order to get there, we have to repent of our sins and let go of the steering wheel.

Then we need to climb into the back seat and let Him do the driving. Don't worry that you don't know the route He's taking. He knows it! And when the ride starts to get rough and you begin to notice that it's not the direction you would have taken, don't panic. He's not taking the wide and well-traveled road that others have taken. Its twists and turns may appear to make for a smoother ride. But the road they are traveling will lead to a sharp precipice and a quick fall straight downward into the earth, and death. For Hell is in the center of the earth (Deut. 32:22, Job 28:5, and Ezekiel 26:20, 32:24). No. The road Christ is taking you is straight and narrow (Matthew 7:13-14). It will sometimes get dark and scary (Psalm 23:4). There will be obstacles along the way. And someone will be telling you, “It's not too late. You can still take back control of the steering wheel and take an easier path, like everyone else. Look at all that green pasture where you can stop and have a picnic. You're going to get awfully hungry if you continue to let God do the driving. Look at all you're giving up.” And you start wondering whether you made the right decision. (See Matthew 4:4, 5:6, John 6:35.)

It's an upward climb, and very steep, but your destination is that shining city at the top of the mountain. It is waiting for you if you love the Lord. If so, you already have a permanent reservation. It's got streets of pure gold, and gates of real pearl (Rev. 21:21), and beauty beyond anything you have ever seen or imagined. It's called “New Jerusalem” (Revelation 21:2). And you may know some loved one who will be waiting for you there. Yet as you get closer to that city, the terrain will get more difficult and you may feel physically weak (Matthew 26:41). But if you have stayed emotionally faithful, and grown stronger in your faith, the news is good. Look, as you get closer to the top, you are starting to see the end of the wide road others chose to climb, and the rocky precipice. There's the sea and the jagged cliffs around it.



Look, now you can see more clearly the result of those who took the easy route. Their wrecks are scattered on the rocks below. Some have already sunk into the water and been swallowed up by the waves.

You're getting closer to that city. All the pain, all the rejection, all the things you lost along the way were all worth it (Rev. 21:10-27)! The light of that city illuminates your path as you near the end of your journey (Rev. 21:23, John 8:12). You stare in awe as the beauty of the city takes your breath away! And there's the ones you love who are waiting for you, waiving and cheering you on. And there's God, the Father, waiting for your arrival. Almost there, and you know you couldn't have made it alone. You didn't know the way. But the One who did, smiles at you from the driver's seat and you hear Him say, “...I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6 NIV). Like Abraham, you have been “...looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10 NIV). You're almost there. Glory to God!

Aren't you glad you let Jesus do the driving?

Wouldn't that be a nice way to sum up your life? It's difficult in this world we know. Jesus knew it would be. “For our struggle is **not** against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12 NIV). In other words, high ranking fallen angels (demons), who have been given power by Satan, to influence people and events in this world.

That's why, before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus was thinking about you who love Him. He said to His Father, “...I am not praying for the world, but for those You have given Me, for they are Yours. All I have is Yours, and all you have is Mine. And glory has come to Me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name - the name you gave Me - so that they may be one as We are one” (John 17:9-11 NIV).

Why was Jesus so concerned about those who love Him? It's because He knew that the devil, Satan, would do everything in his power to distract, tempt, and deceive people away from Christ. For He is our only hope of escaping the same fate Satan and his demons will face when Christ returns. And even many who claim to be Christians, are false prophets who are deceiving a lot of people. For they are leading them on the wide and well-traveled “...road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it” (Matthew 7:13 NIV). So we love Christ enough to remind you of this danger. “For 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).

Anne's article for this issue, “The Refining of Your Faith,” explains this in greater detail. Please keep us in your prayers and for the success of this ministry.

In Christ's love, we remain, *Eric and Anne Kaestner*

# The Refining of Our Faith

By Anne Kaestner

On the surface faith sounds simple. Many people think that Christian faith is just believing in the existence of only one God. But faith is so much more than that! *"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder"* (James 2:19 NIV). In reality, faith is the hardest part of being a Christian! It is the one thing that Satan attacks us on the most. That's because *"...without faith it is impossible to please God..."* (Hebrews 11:6 NIV). It's all about trust (Proverbs 3:5). And it's hard to trust someone you don't know. So it takes experience with Christ to learn how to trust God. Because without Christ we have no protection from the devil's lies and deceit (Matthew 24:5, Acts 20:28-31). For God sees us as vulnerable little lambs unaware that the wolf lays in wait, planning his next attack. 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). The "Him" of course, refers to Christ.

As you grow closer to the Lord Jesus, it will get even harder. Satan will try every dirty trick and carnal temptation to stop you before you get to your goal. As hard as you struggle to live above sin, it will always be before you. You wait on line at the supermarket to pay for some groceries and there's some sleazy magazine with a tantalizing caption just tempting you to look and then buy. You go to a doctor's office and, while you are in the waiting room, there is some old love song playing on the speaker, reminding you about a romance you gave up for Christ. And suddenly you start feeling a sense of nostalgia. At home, you get the mail and there's some advertisement with a seductive looking female right on the cover. You turn on your home computer and suddenly a pornographic pop-up stares at you from the monitor. Thank God, Eric has put software protection from such pop-ups on our computers, but not everyone has it. It's hard to live for Christ in this world, because Satan is running it. He is *"...the prince of the power of the air; the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience"* (Ephesians 2:2 KJV).

It's even worse than it used to be, with the advent of computers, raunchy videos you can watch in your own home, salacious television shows, and vulgar movies and magazines. That's because, *"...Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour"* (1 Peter 5:8 NIV). The devil is especially vicious these days because he knows he doesn't have much time left to rule over the earth (Revelation 12:12). For God put limits on the amount of time He gave to Adam to rule this world. And Satan finagled it away from Adam (Genesis 3:1-11). That time is swiftly running out. So Satan is getting more desperate. It's hard enough when the temptations are obvious. But when they are sneaky and underhanded, that's when it is more difficult. That's why Jesus 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..."* (Matthew 7:15-16 NIV). The "fruit" Jesus was speaking about was the "fruit of the Holy Spirit," which is outlined in Galatians 5:22-25. And the "bad fruit," which is sinful, is explained in Galatians 5:19-21.

I know it is especially difficult at the beginning of your walk with Christ. There are so many false prophets out there leading you in the wrong direction. That's why Jesus said that the false prophets wear sheep's clothing. It means that they look like men and women of God. They may dress in clerical garb. They will misquote the Bible, or take it out of context. And they will tell you all the things

that you want to hear. That we humans are basically good way down inside. But the Bible says, *"The [human] heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked..."* (Jeremiah 17:9-10 KJV). The wolves and hirelings (John 10:12-13) will tell you that if you are a Born Again Christian (John 3:3) you have an unconditional reservation waiting for you in Heaven, no matter what. But even the Apostle Paul was worried about losing his own salvation!

He was writing to the Greeks whose culture invented the Olympics. So he compared salvation to an Olympic type race. He said, *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever"* (1 Corinthians 9:24-25 NIV). In other words, starting the race is like becoming a Born Again Christian (John 3:3). It doesn't get you to the prize unless you finish the race. If you drop out along the way, or become complacent, you will lose. So, stressing the importance of remaining faithful to Christ, Paul said, *"Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize"* (1 Corinthians 9:26-27 NIV).



To stress the importance of finishing the course, Jesus told His disciples, *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and*

*withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned"* (John 15:1-6 NIV). When you sincerely and humbly repent of your sins, God will always forgive you. But don't make the mistake of taking your faith for granted!

Most churches have gotten so influenced by the things of this world that, as Christians, we need to watch for the fruit of the Spirit. For many believers are deceived by bad doctrine (Ephesians 4:14, 2 Timothy 4:3-4), and become discouraged, turning away from Christ. For Satan knows how to entice even believers, with carnal temptations. *"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 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 6:9-10 NIV). Despite what you may hear elsewhere, getting to Heaven still requires one route. And that's the "straight and narrow" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Jesus compared Himself to a bridegroom, who will come to get His bride at a time when no one knew He was coming. The church is compared to ten virgins. Jesus was speaking prophetically. Only five of them had the oil of the Holy Spirit (1 Samuel 16:13) in their lamps. They were the ones He took. The rest were left behind! (See Matthew 25:1-13.). The Lord was speaking metaphorically about those five foolish virgins when He 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). So, remember what Jesus said, "By their fruit you will recognize them..." (Matthew 7:16 NIV). That does not mean social programs or gifts. For Satan can counterfeit the gifts of God! And even the street gang known as the "Hell's Angels" has raised money for charity.

Also, don't look at the miracles, or the fact that someone can quote scripture, and think that they are holy. Satan knows the Bible very well. He even quoted it to Jesus (Matthew 4:6, Psalm 91:11-12). And the devil can perform miracles too. The apostle Paul told us, regarding these "last days," that the false prophets will be able to perform miracles, and deceive people. He said, "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 3:8 NIV). Jannes and Jambres were the magicians of Pharaoh who tried to perform the same miracles as Moses. And at the time of the Antichrist, the False Prophet will also be actively working alongside him (Revelation 16:13-14, 19:20, 20:10).

The Apostle Peter also warned us about false prophets. He said they act like they are going to give you life-giving springs of living water, symbolic of Christ. But they are broken cisterns. "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 to whatever has mastered them. 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 2:17-20 NIV).

God has said, "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jeremiah 2:13 NIV). So, keep your eyes on Christ, and don't let anyone distract you from Him. "Remember Him - before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:6-7 NIV). The "silver cord" is the umbilical cord that connects our body to our spirit. In the spirit world it is silver. But it is invisible to the natural eye. When we humans are in a deep sleep, our spirit can sometimes leave our body and travel in the spirit world, through dreams. Patients who have been near death have said that they left their body and hovered over the operating room, watching the doctors trying to restart their heart. But if God cuts that silver cord, the person is dead and cannot re-enter their body!

So Solomon was warning us to keep our eyes on the one we now know as Jesus Christ, before it is too late. The other metaphors refer to the "water of life," Jesus Christ. Remember what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman by the well, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water" (John 4:10 NIV). Now going back to Ecclesiastes 12:6-7, when the golden bowl is broken, it will not hold water. The same thing is true with the shattered pitcher by the spring. You can't put water in a pitcher that is broken. And likewise, a well with a broken wheel is useless. You can't get any water

out of it! The message is to find the Redeemer while we still have access to Him, through the Holy Spirit and scripture. For when that silver cord is broken you are dead, and it is too late!

You may think that the longer you live for God, the easier it will get. But it is really the opposite. Horatio G. Spafford, a successful lawyer and businessman, was an example of that. He lived in Chicago with his wife, Anna, and five children. They were a Christian family, and their faith was a big part of their life. Nevertheless, they were no strangers to tragedy. Their young son died from pneumonia in 1871. In that same year, much of Horatio's business was lost in the great Chicago fire. Even so, in time, the Lord allowed his business to flourish once more. Then, on November 21, 1873, Anna Stafford and her four daughters crossed the Atlantic from the United States, en route to Europe. They took the French ocean liner, Ville du Havre, and were among 313 passengers. Although Mr. Spafford had planned to go with his family, unexpected business problems delayed his journey. He planned to take another ship and expected to join Anna and their children in Europe a few days later.

Anna and the girls were about four days into the crossing of the Atlantic, when their ship collided with a powerful, iron-hulled Scottish ship, the Loch Earn. Anna hurriedly brought her four children to the deck where she knelt there with them and prayed that God would spare them if that could be His will. If it were not His will, she asked Him to make them ready to endure whatever happened. It only took about twelve minutes for the Ville du Harve to sink beneath the dark



waters of the Atlantic. Can you imagine how terrifying that must have been? Death can come unexpectedly to any of us at any time. Would you be ready to meet Christ? Sadly, Anna was the only one of the Spaffords aboard to survive.

A sailor, rowing a small boat over the spot where the ship went down, spotted Anna floating on a piece of the wreckage. He pulled her into the boat and they were picked up by another large vessel which, nine days later, landed them in Cardiff, Wales. She wired her husband a message which began,

"Saved alone, what shall I do?" Another of the ship's survivors, Pastor Weiss, later recalled Anna saying, "God gave me four daughters. Now they have been taken from me. Someday I will understand why." Horatio booked passage on the next available ship and left to join his grieving wife. Four days into his voyage, the captain called Horatio to his cabin and told him they were over the place where his children went down. According to Bertha Spafford Vester, a daughter born after the tragedy, it was then that Horatio felt inspired, through his grief and his faith, to write the words to the beautiful hymn "It Is Well With My Soul" while still on his journey.

They played that hymn at my mother's funeral on April 5, 1993, the same month that Bible Believers Fellowship, Inc. moved into its first office in town. Among the words to the hymn are: "When peace like a river attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll, Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul." The words are based on the scripture which says, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7 KJV). Anna gave birth to three more children, one of which died at age four with dreaded pneumonia. In August 1881, the Spaffords moved to Jerusalem. Mr. Spafford died and is buried in that city.

I have found, over the many years I have lived for Christ, that when we are in a time of severe testing of our faith, we never know why it is happening. It seems to make no sense to us at all. It's usually only after time passes and we come

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## The Refining of Our Faith (Continued From Page 3)

through the crisis that God reveals the reason to us. That's why the Bible tells us "...My righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him" (Hebrews 10:38 NIV. Also, see Romans 1:17). I'm sure Paul wondered why the Lord allowed him to be stuck in prison at times when he badly wanted to go to the different churches he had started and encourage them. So much persecution was taking place in those young churches that they could have used Paul's presence. But then, if he had been with them he wouldn't have needed to write letters to them. And we wouldn't have had them to teach us God's will. For Paul's letters make up a good part of the New Testament. There's no indication in scripture that Paul knew that his letters would be read by us two thousand years later. He just trusted God no matter what happened.

Too many Christians in the western world have been taking their faith for granted. Jesus spoke about His latter day Laodicean church and said, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of My mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from Me **gold refined in the fire**, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent" (Revelation 3:15-19 NIV). It's easy to serve Christ when it doesn't cost you much. The United States and other countries in western culture have been greatly blessed by God. In modern times most Christians in those nations have never been through severe persecution for their faith. Not so in other countries around the world where thousands of Christians are frequently tortured and die agonizing deaths for Christ.

So what was Jesus talking about when He told the Laodicean church to buy from Him gold refined in the fire? In its natural form gold is just a shiny rock. It is still clinging to the ore it is found in. This is symbolic of new Christians, who still have a lot of the world in them. It takes a long time for God to get the world out of us. "For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:16-17 NIV). And we cannot serve two masters, both God and the Devil. We, in the church, are supposed to be the Bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2, Isaiah 54:5). To put anyone else before Him is to engage in idolatry. James called such idol worshipers adulterers. He wrote to the backslidden church, "You adulterous people, don't you know that 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).

In order to separate that gold from the worthless ore it is clinging to, the refiner has to put it through intense heat. The heat has to be hot enough to burn up the worthless ore so that all that is left is pure gold. Until that process is completed the gold cannot be used for any noble purpose. By then, the gold is in liquid form and ready to be poured into molds. Only then can it be useful to its designer. In like manner, God refines His people (Jeremiah 6:29, Proverbs 17:3, and Malachi 3:2-3). Peter, in his letter to the elders in the church, wrote that through their faith they, "...are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation... In this you greatly rejoice, though now for

a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though **refined by fire** - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:5-7 NIV).

Do you put your religion or church before Christ? Many Christians do! Do you love your children, parents, or anyone else, more than Christ? Would you renounce Christ if you were threatened with death if you did not do so? Do you sacrifice your Christian values to have peace in your household? 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). That may sound harsh, but if God did not spare His own Son, but sacrifice Him for us (John 3:16), how much more He expects us to put Him first before our loved ones!

To illustrate this principle even more, Jesus gave us this metaphor. He said, "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began

to build and was not able to finish'" (Luke 14:28-30 NIV). In other words, don't become a Christian unless you are willing to put Christ first in your heart. He said, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46 NIV). And Jesus compared it to a man who builds a house without a foundation and it is destroyed in bad weather (see Luke 6:48-49). When someone tells people that they are a "Born Again" Christian (John 3:3), and yet they have sin in their life, they make Christ look bad. For we are judged by our actions and lifestyle. And sometimes the cost can be very high!

One of the most terrifying stories I have heard in my lifetime was that of some Pentecostal missionaries in Zimbabwe, Africa. It occurred on November 27th and 28th, of 1987. There were different accounts of what happened because it involved more than one missionary farm. [But in most cases, the missionaries, were tied up and individually hacked to death.](#)

God has been refining His church, often with horrible suffering. And what's scary is that I am seeing signs that the Lord is going to be refining His latter-day Laodicean church soon. Those in the church will have to decide whether to grow closer to Christ or reject Him. He doesn't want a lukewarm church! Therefore, "...it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, 'If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?'" (1 Peter 4:17-18 NIV). As horrible as this may sound, the alternative is far worse! The only good thing about suffering is that it eventually ends, even if it results in death. But Christ died on Calvary to keep us from a fire and torture that will never end (Mark 9:47-49, Luke 16:19-25, Revelation 20:15)! Hardship may follow us in this world, which is ruled by the devil. But "...as it is written: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him' - but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit..." (1 Corinthians 2:9-10 NIV). With all the pain and fear that life brings, isn't it nice to know that there will be a happy forever ending if you continue to follow Christ?

