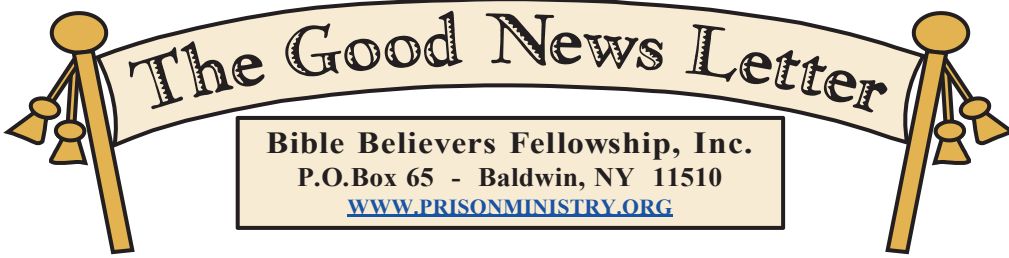




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TAX-EXEMPT

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

October 2024

FROM US TO YOU

The two groups are millenniums apart and very different from each other. However, did you know that there are certain similarities between the United States and Ancient Israel? At one time they were both started by righteous men and women who were aliens in a strange land, looking for a place to become set apart (see 2 Corinthians 6:17) to serve God. The natives around them noticed their lifestyle seemed strange to them (1 Corinthians 2:14). However, God kept them distinctly diverse from the rest, a people He chose for Himself. They both became great nations and eventually were strong and prosperous. One group became a land existing of 12 tribes of Jews called Israel. The other became fifty different states combined together to form a country they called the United States of America. Sadly, after prosperity became a way of life, both nations became corrupt and fell from where they had been when they were first blessed. Ancient Israel made God “...jealous with their foreign gods and angered Him with their detestable idols. They sacrificed to demons, which are not God—gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear. You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth” (Deuteronomy 32:16-18 NIV). The United States is no longer a distinct and separate nation either. Lately our leadership has allowed vicious, evil people into our country, many of which, we believe, are demon possessed (Matthew 8:16, 31-33)! For they go far beyond the evil natural humans would do. The crimes they have committed bare a resemblance to an account in the Bible.

“...Now a Levite who lived in a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim took a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. But she... left him and went back to her father’s house in Bethlehem, Judah. After she had been there four months, her husband went to her to persuade her to return. He had with him his servant and two donkeys. She took him into her father’s house, and when her father saw him, he gladly welcomed him” (Judges 19:1-3 NIV). Her father persuaded him to stay at his house for five more days. “But, unwilling to stay another night, the man left and went toward Jebus (that is, Jerusalem), with his two saddled donkeys and his concubine. When they were near Jebus and the day was almost gone, the servant said to his master, ‘Come, let’s stop at this city of the Jebusites and spend the night.’ His master replied, ‘No. We won’t go into an alien city, whose people are not Israelites. We will go on to Gibeah.’ He added, ‘Come, let’s try to reach Gibeah or Ramah and spend the night in one of those places.’ So they went on, and the sun set as they neared Gibeah in Benjamin” (Judges 19:10-14 NIV).

Apparently the Levite felt safer among his own Israelite people. For they were supposed to be righteous. “That evening an old man from the hill country of Ephraim, who was living in Gibeah (the men of the place were Benjamites), came in from his work in the fields” (Judges 19:16 NIV). He talked to the Levite briefly, then offered them a place to stay at his house for the night. They accepted. “While

they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, ‘Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him.’ The owner of the house went outside and said to them, ‘No, my friends, don’t be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don’t do this disgraceful thing. Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But to this man, don’t do such a disgraceful thing.’ But the men would not listen to him. So the man took his concubine and sent her outside to them, and they raped her and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go. At daybreak the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, fell down at the door and lay there until daylight. When her master got up in the morning and opened the door of the house and stepped out to continue on his way, there lay his concubine, fallen in the doorway of the house, with her hands on the threshold” (Judges 19:22-27 NIV).

The Levite “...said to her, ‘Get up; let’s go.’ But there was no answer. Then the man put her on his donkey and set out for home. When he reached home, he took a knife and cut up his concubine, limb by limb, into twelve parts and sent them into all the areas of Israel. Everyone who saw it said, ‘Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites came up out of Egypt. Think about it! Consider it! Tell us what to do!’” (Judges 19:28-30 NIV). So apparently, every inch of her body was attacked! This was done by men from the tribe of Benjamin, a tribe that God had blessed. The rest of the tribes were shocked.

America is supposed to be a civilized country. However, under the current administration, evil foreigners have been let into this country and many innocent American women and children have likewise been viciously attacked, raped, and murdered! As a result of what the Benjamites did, Israel went to war and “The Benjamites came out of Gibeah and cut down twenty-two thousand Israelites on the battlefield that day” (Judges 20:21 NIV). “The LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel, and on that day the Israelites struck down 25,100 Benjamites, all armed with swords” (Judges 20:35 NIV). So, a total of 47,100 men of Israel died! “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They... invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:28-32 NIV). Pray for America!

In the service of our Lord, *Eric and Anne Kaestner*



THE GREATEST SIN OF ALL

By Anne Kaestner

What does God consider the worst sin of all? Of all the sins mankind can produce, what sin is the mother of them all, the springboard to just about every other sin known to mankind? Is it murder? Or adultery? Or robbery? Or blasphemy? No. Consider the Ten Commandments God gave to Israel (Exodus 20:1-17). A Pharisee once asked Jesus, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:36-39 NIV). Jesus summed up all ten commandments into two basic laws of God. The greatest commandment is to put God first, before anything else in your life. That means, if you’re a sincere Christian, **everything** takes a back seat compared to the love God expects from His children (see John 1:12-13). That includes your family, profession, friends, talent, wealth, those you love (Matthew 10:34-39), everything!

The flip side of Matthew 22:36-39 is to love anything else above Him, especially yourself. That’s why Jesus had so much trouble with the Pharisees of His day (John 8:31-51). They loved themselves more! I checked my Word-Web dictionary for a proper definition of the word “pharisee,” and it gave me an interesting answer. One of the definitions of “pharisee” is “A self-righteous or sanctimonious person.” Basically that amounts to self-love, sometimes sarcastically referred to as “holier than Thou.” So the most evil of all sins is the one that started it all. It was the one that led Lucifer (Satan) to become jealous of God (Isaiah 14:12-17) and start a mutiny in Heaven (Revelation 12:7-9). It was the one that caused Eve to bite into the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:6-7) and encourage her husband to do so as well.

Over the years it has even been promoted in backslidden churches under the terms like “self-esteem” or the “King’s Kid” doctrine. Paul had to deal with this deceitful doctrine in his day. It had infiltrated the Corinthian church. In order to wake them up to this sneaky sin, Paul got sarcastic with them. He said, “For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children” (1 Corinthians 4:7-14 NIV). Obviously, the primary sin I am referring to is **pride**. It is the catalyst of every other sin known to mankind.

Back in the late 1990’s this ministry was offered a large quantity of Bibles free of charge by the “American Bible Society.” One of their executives took Eric and myself out to dinner and tried to persuade us to provide to prisons, a new type of Bible they were publishing, the Kwanzaa Bible. He promoted it as a good way to provide young black men in prison with “self-esteem.” The executive told us that

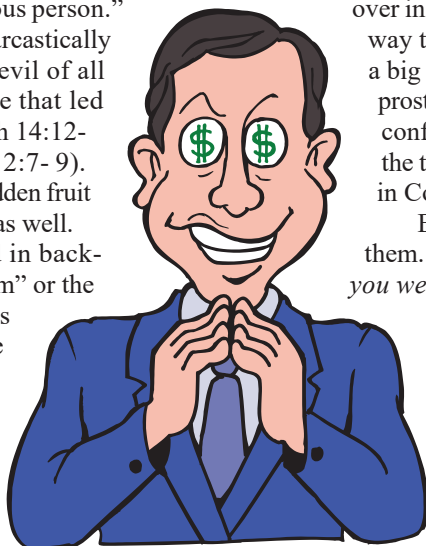
they believe that young black men commit crimes because they don’t have enough “self-esteem” and that a Kwanzaa Bible would be a good way to restore it. Frankly, I was appalled with the idea, but I was careful not to show it. It was the total opposite of the teaching of Christ and His apostles! Jesus said, “...whoever **exalts** himself will be humbled, and whoever **humbles** himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12 NIV). Even God’s own Son, Jesus, was humbled for us. “And being found in appearance as a man, He **humbled Himself** and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:8 NIV). I asked the executive if we could still have the grant if we didn’t take the Kwanzaa Bibles. Fortunately he said yes, and there was no more discussion about them. We received King James Version bibles instead.

I find Paul’s message to the Corinthian church very interesting. He was in Greece on one of His many missionary trips after he came to the Lord (Acts 20:2). His message to the Athenians didn’t receive a promising reception. They thought of themselves as very sophisticated, affluent, enlightened people. They worshiped many idols and didn’t think Paul, in his message about the cross, could teach them anything. However, the Corinthians were more interested. Athens wasn’t very far away from Corinth. (I know because Eric and I stopped over in Athens and Corinth for a few hours in 1983 on our way to Israel.) So being so close to Athens had created a big influence on the Corinthians. Some of them were prostitutes (see 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). But Paul saw their confusion between the lifestyle of the Athenians and the teachings about Christ, and he started a church there in Corinth.

Eventually, after leaving, Paul wrote two letters to them. In his first letter he said, “*Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that **no one may boast before Him***” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29 NIV). Paul was saying that God

uses people that society doesn’t consider very important, or socially elite. It’s so that the person won’t be greatly admired, God will. The Lord has used fishermen, like Peter and John (Matthew 4:18-22), shepherds, like Joseph (Genesis 46:31-34), and David (1 Samuel 16:10-13), a tax collector, named Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13), and Christ Himself was a carpenter (Matthew 13:53-55, Mark 6:3). Such individuals changed the world! In today’s society, they would be ordinary people like, plumbers, hairdressers, and truck drivers. Before we started this ministry in 1989, my husband, Eric, was a letter carrier, and I was a secretary.

If Christ, who made us and this whole universe (John 1:1-4), was willing to humble Himself enough to die in our place, who are you or I to exalt ourselves before God? We are nothing without Him! Adam’s sin cast all of us, his seed and descendants, into the clutches of Satan, who will eventually end up in Hell (Matthew 25:41) and the Lake of Fire forever (Revelation 20:10). We were destined to go with him as his possession (John 8:34) until Jesus paid the debt we owed God for our sin. It was a debt we could never pay! We were in a miserable, helpless, state without our Redeemer (Romans 5:3-8). We could never free ourselves from the heavy weight of sin we bore. And yet, through prophecy, Isaiah spoke of the Jewish religious hier-



archy in the days of Christ. They were pompous and condescending to the general population (Mark 12:38-40). Regarding their attitude toward Jesus, Isaiah says, *“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted”* (Isaiah 53:3-4 NIV).

With the exception of a few Pharisees who accepted Christ, like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (see John 19:38-39), those snobbish, condescending Pharisees and their counterparts, are **not** in Heaven today. And Hell is the only other place. There is no purgatory! Jesus is the only way we can get to Heaven (John 14:6 and 1 Timothy 2:5). And Jesus said to the condescending Pharisees, *“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me!”* (John 8:44-45 NIV). People always think that they can get to Heaven by their good works. The problem is that we don’t realize how evil we humans are. We judge ourselves by human standards, comparing ourselves to one another. It’s like saying, “Oh, it’s not so bad that he sleeps in the gutter because that other guy lives in the cesspool.” Yet Christ is supposed to be our example, not someone more sinful! Therefore, if you are saved in Christ, *“...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. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, **which God prepared in advance for us to do**”* (Eph. 2:8-10 NIV). And you can only do those prepared works through the Holy Spirit!

In Old Testament times, good works were demonstrated by giving God some kind of sacrifice. It was usually an animal. However, Jesus became God’s ultimate sacrifice for us (John 3:16). These days people want to show how devoted they are to God by building large, expensive churches or Cathedrals to Him. The Catholic Church does that a lot. To make that worse, they often add one or more statues to it. God has another name for them. He calls them “graven images.” Even if it’s supposed to be symbolic of Christ, it’s still a “graven image” to God! The Bible says, *“Thou shalt not make unto thee any **graven image**, or any likeness of **any thing that is in Heaven above**, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth”* [Hell] (Exodus 20:4 KJV). Jesus is in Heaven, so statues of Christ are wrong as well. God the Father and God the Son are in Heaven, not within the statue! We reach Him through humble prayer. *“For this is what the high and lofty One says—He who lives forever, whose name is holy: ‘I live in a high and holy place, but also with Him who is **contrite** and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the **lowly** and to revive the heart of the contrite’”* (Isaiah 57:15 NIV). We feel His presence through the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17). The worst, most destructive pride of all, was the one Jesus had to deal with in regard to the Pharisees and Sadducees in His day, religious pride and arrogance. And Jesus said that people with that kind of attitude will **not** get to Heaven unless they swallow their pride, get off their high horse (so to speak) and repent of this great sin. Such people must ask God for His forgiveness and *“...live by the Spirit...”* (Galatians 5:25 NIV). The self-righteous attitude is what is in demon possessed individuals even these days. I sense the presence of demon

spirits speaking through the mouths of religious leaders in Iran.

I was at the supermarket one day when the cashier in my line turned to the cashier at the next register and, in an angry voice, said, “If you have a problem with me, then you have a problem with God too, because He made me.” The other woman was fairly quiet, but the angry cashier kept provoking her by saying, “I’ve given you something to think about, haven’t I? Do you hear me?” I knew it wouldn’t do any good to remind her that Jesus taught us to be humble of spirit, not arrogant and hostile (see Luke 14:8-11). Paul said of himself and his fellow evangelists, *“To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world”* (1 Corinthians 4:11-13 NIV).

The woman in the supermarket was definitely in the mood for an argument, and the other cashier looked very uncomfortable. Christians, it’s not what we **say** to people that leads them to Christ. It’s when they see His light reflected in our lives (Matthew 5:14 and John 8:12), and the good fruit that He brings. That’s when hearts are touched and drawn to Christ in conviction and repentance! This is not the natural way of the world today, but it is God’s way. I find it interesting that the angry woman was black. She didn’t seem to have

any problem with self-esteem. Yet that’s what the executive for the American Bible Society said was lacking in young black men. Over the decades, I have noticed that the doctrine of self-esteem is promoted quite a lot in black churches. Yet the black men and women in whom I have felt God’s Presence the most are humble of spirit and more impressive in their Christian walk. Several of them are in the media or politics. They are wise and well-spoken in a quiet, respectful way. And they give God credit for the things that they have accomplished in life! Let God have all the glory!

The world may think that you are foolish if you love and serve Jesus Christ, *“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto*

*Him: neither can he know them, because they are **spiritually discerned**”* (1 Corinthians 2:14 KJV). The truth of God’s Word cannot be found in deep intellectual thought (1 Corinthians 3:19-20). It is found in faith (Mark 11:22-23, Matthew 16:13-19) and love (1 John 4:16, 1 John 4:19, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13) toward our Creator. That’s why Jesus said *“...unless you change and become like little children, you will **never** enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven”* (Matthew 18:3-4 NIV). God can’t put His Spirit into us until we are willing to relinquish the worldly spirit we were born with. That’s why we have to be Born Again (John 3:3) spiritually. We have to be willing to give it all up, and let go of the world’s hold on us.

Jesus said, *“...no man putteth new wine into old wineskins; else the wine will burst the skins, and the wine perish, and the skins: but they put new wine into fresh wine-skins”* (Mark 2:22 ASV). We have to be reborn Christians (2 Corinthians 5:17), totally emptied out of our worldly past. That way Christ can sterilize us and make of us new wineskins. Because that is the only way that He is able to pour the *“...new wine”* (Acts 2:13-18 KJV) of His Holy Spirit into us! And without the Holy Spirit in us, we are not truly capable of serving God! When we belong to Him, He must make the decisions in our life, not us! Unfortunately, too many people will not relinquish their own self-will. They want **(Continued on Page 4)**



to do things for Him. They want to make their own decisions and choices regarding what kind of a ministry they will have, where they will live, how they will dress, who they will marry, where they will work, what they will or won't do for God, etc. People, this is not what it means to be Christ-centered. This is self-centered!

Cain tried to impress God with his hard work, the sweat of skin, working hard to produce fresh delicious fruit and vegetables for God. But they were not acceptable by the Almighty. His brother, Abel, was a shepherd. All he had to do was to sit under a nice shady tree and watch the sheep all day and night. Abel brought God a young lamb, a blood sacrifice. God accepted Abel's sacrifice (see Genesis 4:3-7). His brother, Cain, didn't think that was fair. However, Cain's sacrifice was hard work, but Abel's was more dangerous. Remember what another shepherd, named David, said. He was about to kill the giant, Goliath (1 Samuel 17:4). He needed to persuade King Saul that, even though he looked short and puny compared to Goliath, he was strong enough, with God's help, to do the job (1 Samuel 17:34-37). God isn't interested in the good works that we think we are doing for Him. As King David prayed in tears, after his terrible sin with Bathsheba, *"O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. 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 51:15-17 NIV). Worldly humans can still do good works, but the world isn't going to Heaven (1 John 2:15-17). You might think that you are going to build a great university or hospital for God, and help lots of needy people. But, *"...unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain"* (Psalms 127:1 NIV).

Jesus tried to teach His disciples this by washing their feet (see John 13:1-17)! The disciples of Christ were typical of many Christians today. *"At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?' He called a little child and had him stand among them. And He said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven'"* (Matthew 18:1-4 NIV). Many years later, when the Apostle Peter was mature in his walk with God, he wrote a letter to new believers in Christ, passing on to them the lessons Jesus had taught him. He said, *"...rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good"* (1 Peter 2:1-3 NIV).

The fruit the Holy Spirit *"...is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control... Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other"* (Galatians 5:22-26 NIV). True faith in God does not look at circumstances or listen to the "wisdom of men" (1 Corinthians 1:19-20, 2:1-14) when it conflicts with the will of God. *"For who has known the mind of the Lord that He may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 2:16 NIV). What does this mean? Paul was writing to the Christian church in Corinth, Greece. These were new, fledgling believers who had been

Born Again (John 3:3), but they were not mature in their walk with God.

Like most Christians today, they still had a lot of the world in them. Consequently, God wasn't able to pour His Spirit into their hearts in full measure, any more than a man can pour a full glass of wine into a glass that is already two thirds full of soda. God wants to take up residence in the hearts of those who love Him. However, He doesn't want the devil as a housemate! So Paul was trying to teach them God's ways. But first, he had to undo the damage that this world had already wrought on their minds. Any construction contractor will tell you that it is much easier to build a new house on land that has not previously been used, than to knock down an existing structure and build from scratch. In those days, Corinth, Greece was a very sophisticated city. It was a seaport that had become prosperous through international trade. The Greeks thought of themselves as great philosophers and writers. They worshiped the material world, especially education and aesthetic pursuits. Even the word "aesthetic" comes from the Greek word "aisthetikos." Beauty and grace wasn't just a perception to them, it was a goddess named Aphrodite.

The Greeks lived in a world filled with gods and goddesses of their own making (see Deuteronomy 32:17-18, Psalm 96:4-5, Daniel 5:3-31, Zephaniah 2:9-11, Romans 1:18-32, 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, Galatians 4:8-9). This was the culture of the people, and they had become very proud of their achievements. But their culture had been based on idolatry! In the world we live in today, the ancient architecture of Greece is still highly praised. My husband, Eric, and I visited some of the ancient ruins when we were in Greece in 1983. However, the most beautiful of all were the temples, such as the Parthenon, that were built for the worship of Greek gods! In many respects, the Greeks were a lot like Americans today. They lived for pleasure and knowledge. Sports had become to them, an obsession. The world-wide Olympic competitions that are held today, originated in Ancient Greece.

Their purpose was to glorify, entertain, and worship Greek gods.

This was the lifestyle that the new Christians in Corinth had been born into it. They had come to Christ, but habits from the past are hard to break. For their philosophy, their culture, had been indoctrinated into them since childhood, and until they came to Christ, they had not known any other way to live. Paul's job, was a difficult one. He, and other Christian evangelists, had to convince the Corinthians that God would never be able to grow good fruit in them until their old nature was changed. When we repent of our sin, and are Born Again, we don't instantly become perfect. We just change directions! But any new Christian has a long way to go in his walk with God before the Lord will be able to grow fruit in him. That's because fruit doesn't pop up instantly from seed. It takes time to grow and develop. It takes tender nurturing and loving attention before it is able to produce even the little buds that eventually blossom into fruit. Many churches these days seem to be more interested in growing larger congregations than in producing the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:19-25) for God. *"This is what the LORD says: 'Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. Where is the house you will build for Me? Where will My resting place be? Has not My hand made all these things, and so they came into being?'" declares the LORD. 'This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at My word'"* (Isaiah 66:1-2 NIV).

