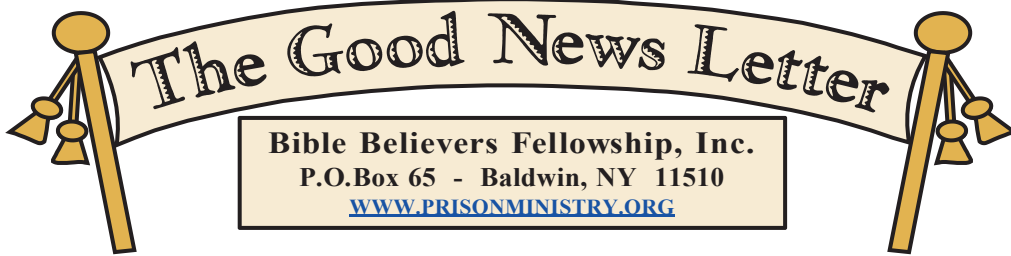




NON-PROFIT



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TAX-EXEMPT

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

June 2024

FROM US TO YOU

We had some sad news recently. Eric's sister, Nina, went home to be with Jesus on Sunday, May 5, 2024. She's in a better place now. However, we will miss her. She was 83 years old and suffered from heart disease. She was living in Florida at the time. How the years pass by quickly! It doesn't feel like it was that long ago that Nina packed up her car and she, and her friend, Sara Torrado, (our first Spanish translator) drove out from California for our wedding here in New York, in April 1980. Nina left California nearly twenty years later and moved to Florida. She was a source of inspiration and encouragement for us. For example, in 1999, she drove up from Florida to help us move into our house. Nina has assisted us, and our ministry, in many ways since then. She typed all of the Spanish translation of our newsletter when Sara translated it. Best of all, Nina was a Christian! She sincerely loved the Lord and tried to please Him, and us, in any way she could. So we know she's in Heaven with Jesus now. And, when God calls us home, we will see her again! Heaven is a much better place to be than anywhere in this messed up world with all its misery and turmoil. For God runs Heaven. *"And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in Him"* (1 John 4:16 NIV). Heaven is a place full of joy because all its residents are full of the love of God. And Satan isn't there and never will be (Revelation 20:10). Hallelujah!

The rest of us are stuck here, in this sinful world that Satan is currently running (see Matthew 4:8-10). Even the occasional good things that happen are not without consequences (Matthew 16:26). However, Satan doesn't have much time left (Revelation 12:12). For the period of time that God gave to Adam, to run this world, had limits on it. Through Adam's sin (Genesis 3:6), Satan got control of that time period. But it is quickly running out. Jesus will soon be coming back (Revelation 19:11-21). *"Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape"* (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 NIV). However, if you are a sincere Christian, you have much to look forward to. When you're young, it seems like you have your whole life ahead of you. But you don't really know how long that will be. Young people die every day as well. Your life can change in an instant! You struggle hard to make the best of it, but life is full of lessons and all of us make many bad decisions as we grow older. However, smart Christians learn from them. The older you get, the more the years seem to speed up very quickly.

June is the traditional month that young people graduate from high school or college. It's the time for commencement speeches. Many graduates have had the disadvantage of not getting the celebration they would have liked because politics has gotten in the way. Palestinian protesters have become so loud and disruptive that many graduates are not getting the type of celebration they would have hoped for. And those who gave keynote speeches were often drowned out with angry

rhetoric from the protesters. So we will deliver a commencement speech to you in biblical style. For the purpose of the speech is to point you in the right direction as you start a new course in life. The most important thing you do, as a Christian, is to make sure that you are totally in the will of God. That doesn't necessarily always mean the will of the church. For the Christian church comes in many different denominations. And each one interprets the Bible in different ways. Then there is the Catholic Church, whose doctrines are quite different from the Bible in important ways. Consider what Jesus said, *"These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men"* (Matthew 15:8-9 NIV. Also, see Luke 6:39).

So, seek the will of God in your life and when in doubt about church teaching, see what the Bible has to say on the matter. If you can't find the scripture that answers your question, and you need help, we have a section for that on our website. So, as Christians, *"... You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him"* (2 Peter 3:11-14 NIV). One aspect of the faith that is often difficult for Christians is patience. Have you asked the Lord for something that seems good to you? But you wait and wait, and it feels like God is not answering your prayer. God has a different perspective from mankind. You're in the midst of the problem. You're like the old adage, "to close to the forest to see the trees." God is looking downward on the problem, as if He were in a plane flying overhead. You may not see

the hungry bear just a few yards away. The Lord would see it. You don't see the forest ranger half a mile away. You think you're alone. However, with God, you are never alone, if you love Him. So, *"...do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day"* (2 Peter 3:8 NIV).

To paraphrase a story we once heard, it has been said that a man came up to the Apostle John one day. John was the last of the disciples of Christ that were left. The man said, "Sir, I want to be a Christian, but I am a soldier. What must I do?" John replied, "Be the best soldier for Christ that you can be." You may not all be called to be preachers, evangelists, or missionaries. God uses doctors, lawyers, accountants, builders, barbers, hairdressers, and many other professions too. So put Christ first before your career or anything else (Matthew 10:34-38). And live for Him in whatever direction you are called. Here's hoping some day He will say to you, *"... Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"* (Matthew 25:21 NIV).

In the Lord's service, *Eric and Anne Kaestner*



Nina and Ginger (her Chihuahua)

Carrying Your Cross

By Anne Kaestner

My mother wasn't a vain person about her looks, but she was always very sensitive that her hair wasn't as thick and nice as she would have liked it, and she was missing the top of her right index finger due to a childhood accident. When I was about five years old, I asked her one day about the way she felt about it. She replied "It's the cross I have to bear." Her terminology didn't mean much to me at the time because I didn't know my Bible well at that age, and my family wasn't very religious. However, as a teenager, I became more aware that it was a statement of Jesus Christ that my mother had been referring to, albeit in a somewhat flippant way. Over the years, Christian phrases have often become so much a part of the lexicon of our language that people tend to forget their real spiritual meaning. What Jesus actually said was "...*anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple*" (Luke 14:27 NIV). This has a frequently misunderstood but highly spiritual meaning! In fact, it wasn't until I was in my twenties that I really began to understand what Jesus was saying.

Most people have a somewhat preconceived idea of what it takes to be a good Christian. They think it's just being a law-abiding, nice person, attending church regularly, showing kindness to others, and loving one's family and showing them respect. The latter flies in the face of what Jesus started out to say. "*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be My disciple*" (Luke 14:26 NIV). The word was translated "hate" because the translators wanted to use a word that was strong enough to distinguish the difference in the message that Jesus was trying to convey. In society today we tend to associate the word "hate" with murder, war, holocaust, torture, and all kinds of evil. However, that was not what Jesus meant. For God, whom we serve, is the epitome of love (1 John 4:8). "*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).

To get a better understanding of what Jesus really meant, take a look at what Christ said to Peter after Jesus rose from the dead. "*When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love Me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.'* Jesus said, '*Feed My lambs.*' Again Jesus said, '*Simon son of John, do you truly love Me?*' He answered, '*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*' Jesus said, '*Take care of My sheep.*' The third time He said to him, '*Simon son of John, do you love Me?*' Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, '*Do you love Me?*' He said, '*Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.*' Jesus said, '*Feed My sheep*'" (John 21:15-17 NIV). Of course, we know that the Lord's sheep are His beloved believers that accepted Him as their Savior and Lord. Do you remember the passage from Isaiah that 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)?

We humans are the sheep, and the "Lord's sheep" are those of us who have come to God in prayer, repenting of their sins and asking for God's forgiveness. As a result, we are saved from an eternity in Hell (Mark 9:48, Luke 16:19-25) and the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15, 21:8) because we are accepting Christ as our Savior and Lord. (There is no Purgatory. Contrary to Catholic doctrine, it doesn't exist.) Jesus Christ is our Savior because He was the one who paid for our sins with

His own blood (1 Timothy 2:5). He was the one Isaiah was speaking of when he said, "*...the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*" (Isaiah 53:6 NIV). God the Father loved sinful humanity so much that He allowed "*...His only begotten Son...*" (John 3:16 KJV) to suffer and die in our place. And the Lord's reference to "feeding the sheep" is what I am doing by teaching you God's Word (Matthew 4:4). So what Jesus was asking Peter is, "Do you love Me more than your friends, family, and everyone else?" And that's what Jesus was meaning when He said, "*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be My disciple*" (Luke 14:26 NIV). Most people expect a person to love their family, and those close to themselves the most. But Jesus is saying, "Love me more."

I remember when my husband, Eric, and I were in New Hampshire years ago. I asked a woman if she could recommend a nice romantic restaurant for us to have dinner. She did. It was a nice place. But when she found out that we had been married for years she said to me, "You're married? What's your secret?" Another woman asked me the same question years later when I was at my oral surgeon's office. I told her, "My husband and I are both Born Again (John 3:3) Pentecostal Christians, and we both love the Lord." To go deeper, the

reason why we have such a good marriage is because we both love the Lord Jesus Christ more than we love each other! So Jesus isn't saying, "Don't love the people that you love." He is saying, "Love Me more." To illustrate this better, I refer you to these examples. "*...A teacher of the law came to Him and said, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever You go.' Jesus replied, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.' Another disciple said to Him, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' But Jesus told him, 'Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead'*" (Matthew 8:19-22 NIV). Jesus was implying that the disciple may not get another chance to follow Him. In those days, Jesus was always on the move. So He was telling the man that, eternally speaking,

there was nothing more important than following Christ. He was telling the man that there were plenty of other people available to bury the dead man. They were spiritually dead (Rev. 2:11, 20:6). But Jesus was the only one who could give him salvation!

When I was a very young child and heard about the price Jesus paid for our sin, I asked my mother if she would love me enough to be crucified in my place. She was very honest. She said, "No. Because it's such a horrible way to die isn't it?" I had chosen my mother to ask because I didn't know that I needed to accept Christ as my own personal Savior at the time. So, in those days, she was the one whom I loved the most. I felt a pang of pain at first. However, now that I have grown up, and have learned that Jesus suffered for me in other ways as well as the crucifixion, I realize that such a thing is too much to ask of the ones we love. Only Christ could love us that much! Jesus was punched in the face many times, and spit upon. In Isaiah, God's Son spoke prophetically, through the anointing of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21), of His future suffering for those who accepted Him as Savior and Lord. He said, "*I offered My back to those who beat Me, My cheeks to those who pulled out My beard; I did not hide My face from mocking and spitting*" (Isaiah 50:6 NIV).

Considering all of this, it doesn't seem to be such a big request from the Lord to put Him first. However, there's more to it than that. Jesus said, "*And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple. 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 14:27-30 NIV). The fact is, if you're a true Christian, it's not without cost that your name is written down in God's book of the redeemed in Christ (Rev. 20:15). You could never pay the enormous price to reimburse God for your own sin. Only Jesus Christ could do that! However, it will cost you something. Nevertheless, when you think about it in terms of eternity, there is just no comparison. First of all, the family that you always believed loved you, if they don't know the Lord, may suddenly think of you as their enemy. Jesus said, "a man's enemies will be the members of his own household" (Matthew 10:36 NIV). After you accept Christ as your personal Savior, you are no longer one of them. You love the Lord now. You will find their attitude will change toward you.

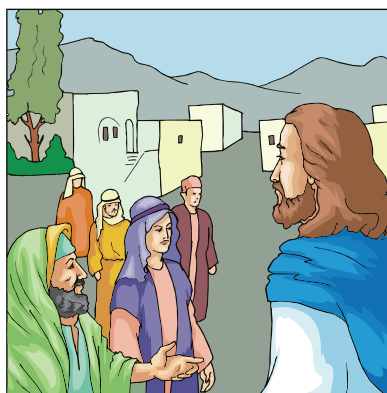
Moreover, once you come to Christ you will see things differently. I remember when, after a few years of backsliding when I was in my twenties, I came back to Christ. The next day when I stood on the train platform, I looked across the street at the nursing home that was there. It was covered in snow. I had seen that building, with snow, many times before, but now it suddenly looked so beautiful to me. I saw beauty in God's creation that I hadn't noticed for years. However, the biggest change I saw was when I first came to Christ at age 10. My family had always treated me fairly well up until then. They did not have much money but my two siblings and I always had gifts at Christmas time. My parents believed strongly in corporal punishment, and I when I was little, I got a lot of spankings. But they were fair, even if I'd get hit for something small, like spilling a cup of tea during a meal. Despite this, in those days, I seemed to be the favorite child in the household. All that changed! Suddenly, no matter who was to blame, I was the one who got slapped, often across the face, by both parents. And if I didn't do anything they could blame on me, they would provoke me to cause me to say something for which they could accuse me of being disrespectful. The Pharisees did the same thing to Jesus. They would provoke Him until they made Him angry (John 8:30-59).

After I accepted Christ as my Savior and Lord, I became a pariah to my family. I became the butt of jokes and mockery, and my mother would encourage other people to treat me with disrespect. She would also talk about me behind my back disparagingly. At home, I remained the odd one out. My parents moved out of Queens, New York when I was 13, and I wasn't able to attend the church anymore where I had accepted Christ. My family considered themselves Christians, so they chose a lukewarm church on Long Island, where they had bought a house. I was technically considered a part of their family because they liked to keep up appearances. But the closeness I had once felt with my family was gone. If you are blessed with strong Christians in your family, you are unlikely to go through this. But if they are lukewarm (Revelation 3:16), unsaved, or just churchianity Christians, don't be surprised when this happens. Joseph went through this too (Genesis 37:4-20), and so did David (1 Samuel 17:20-30). Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12 NIV).

Even Jesus was considered the odd one out by His family. "...Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take His life. But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to Him, 'You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that Your disciples may see the miracles

you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show Yourself to the world.' For even His own brothers did not believe in Him. Therefore Jesus told them, 'The right time for Me has not yet come; for you any time is right. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify that what it does is evil. You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for Me the right time has not yet come'" (John 7:1-8 NIV). Of course, when Jesus said, "the time is not right for Me," He was referring to the time of His arrest and execution, but His brothers didn't know what He meant.

In fact, the family of Jesus thought He was crazy. It didn't make any sense to them that Jesus was standing up to the powerful religious leaders in His day, the Pharisees and Sadducees, and bringing their anger upon Himself. They thought no sane person would do that. Therefore, one day, "While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, His mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to Him. Someone told Him, 'Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to You.' He replied to him, 'Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?' Pointing to His disciples, He said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers. For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother'" (Matt. 12:46-50 NIV). That's why Jesus said, "...I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3 NIV). If you are a true Christian, you are of the second birth, **not** the first. Through the first birth you were born into sin, through the seed of Adam (Genesis



3:6). So you need to be cleansed of that sin of the first birth that contaminated you. You need to be spiritually reborn, through the **last** Adam, Jesus Christ. "So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the **last Adam**, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:45-48 NIV).

It's not just with your family, but your close friends, neighbors, and worldly or backslidden associates, it's the same way. They just won't understand you and your new relationship God. They will think you have gotten "too religious" or crazy. They will think that way because "The man without the [Holy] Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are **foolishness** to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14 NIV). Jesus had that experience when He visited His own hometown. The people who watched Him grow up and knew Him said, "'Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't His mother's name Mary, and aren't His brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all His sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?' And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, 'Only in His hometown and in His own house is a prophet without honor.' And He did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith'" (Matthew 13:55-58 NIV). Some shallow Christians might give up on their faith when this happens. It's human nature to want to belong to something greater than yourself, a club, a group, a family. And it's painful to feel rejected and verbally or physically attacked. Shallow believers don't have enough foundation in Christ. So they feel alone and castigated and tend to give up living for Christ (1 Timothy 1:18-20).

Jesus put it in a parable this way. "Then He told them many things in parables, saying: 'A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil

(Continued on Page 4)

was **shallow**. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown” (Matthew 13:3-8 NIV). “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has **no root, he lasts only a short time**. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly **falls away**. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown” (Matthew 13:18-23 NIV).

Of course, the good soil is a good receptive heart for the Lord. And it produces good fruit. Jesus was referring to spiritual fruit, doing God’s will and spreading the Gospel His way. The “spiritual fruit” is fruit of the Holy Spirit. “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 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). “*The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God*” (Galatians 5:19-21 NIV). However, it needs to be said that many Christians erroneously think that they are unpopular with people because of their relationship with Christ. I know because I have interviewed people who told me they were Christians. Then they said that their previous boss disliked them because of their faith. I made the mistake of hiring some of them. It was then obvious to me that it was their own laziness or bad attitude that made them problem employees. It was just easier to blame their problems on Christ.

However, if you truly love Christ and have a real Christian attitude, you will suffer the devil’s wrath for all the good fruit you bear for the Lord. God allows you to be tested (see Isaiah 48:10 and 1 Peter 1:7). How do you know the true value of anything if it hasn’t been tested? God wants to know if you truly love Him more than your family, friends, health, finances, car, house, or even your own life. You may lose your job. You may lose your marriage. I knew one woman who loved her husband very much, but she loved Christ more, and it cost her her marriage. She was an attractive woman. But her husband couldn’t handle taking second place to Jesus. She eventually died, but she went to Heaven. You may suffer financially. Your children may turn against you. However, if you remain solid in your relationship with the Lord, you are **carrying your cross for Him**.

Since the time of the resurrection, Christians have suffered in many ways. In 1971 to 1979, Idi Amin was the president of Uganda. He started out as a pro-westerner but eventually shifted to being

backed by Libya, the Soviet Union, and East Germany (which was still a part of the Soviet Union at that time). Idi Amin started out as a supporter of Israel, but soon turned against her. He developed a fierce hatred for Christians in his country. James W. Reapsome, a former editor of Evangelical Missions Quarterly (EMQ) says about 400,000 Christians died, disappeared, or fled the country during his reign. The government of Idi Amin didn’t want to waste bullets on many of them and so lots of them were clubbed to death. Those Christians were carrying their cross all the way to Heaven!

As I mentioned previously, this is the type of thing that Jesus was talking about when 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). He was saying, “Consider your decision carefully before you come to Me. I do not want any lukewarm believers (Revelation 3:16). I want a total commitment or none at all. Don’t come to Me unless you are willing to pay the price and be willing, if necessarily, to suffer for Me or, if need be, die for Me. But I am the only one who can save you (see John 14:6). So if you are not willing, if necessary, to give up all the worldly things that mean so much to you, and your own carnal comfort, don’t come. I only want those who will carry their cross all the way.” Many preachers talk about the love of God so much that people think of Christianity as if it is “the love boat.” It is not. It is a battleship (1 Timothy 1:19, 6:12, and 2 Timothy 2:3)! Because Satan has those who love Christ as his target. So “*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings*” (1 Peter 5:8-9 NIV).



Down through the ages, thousands and thousands of Christians have died carrying their cross for Christ. They are all in Heaven.

Some of the worst suffering for the Lord took place during the days of the early church and the centuries right before the Protestant Reformation. The Roman Empire would crucify believers until Emperor Constantine put a stop to it. He claimed to join the church, but if he was sincere, he was, at best, only a new believer. Nevertheless, he took charge of the church and changed major doctrines of it. It became the Catholic Church. Then, from about the end of the fifth century to around 1495 a new enlightenment occurred in the church. In those days, most people were agricultural workers. Only the hierarchy of the church knew how to read. So ordinary people couldn’t read the Bible for themselves, even if they had been able to have access to it. The Bible was only translated in Latin. So people were told not question the authority of the church. Then, over time, Catholic theologians began to study the Bible for themselves. To their horror, they realized that church doctrines didn’t measure up to the teachings of Christ and His apostles. The anger of church leaders led to horrible suffering among the protesters. Thousands were tortured and burned alive at the stake. They were the forerunners of what became the Protestant religion. It wasn’t until the time of Martin Luther that the suffering stopped. True Christians owe a tremendous debt to those who went before us. Through their faith and suffering, millions of us have the freedom to worship God as we chose because they were willing to “carry their cross” for Christ, all the way to Heaven. Amen.