



JUNE 15, 2011

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

STUDY EDITION

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE, *The Watchtower*, is to honor Jehovah God, the Supreme Ruler of the universe. Just as watchtowers in ancient times enabled a person to observe developments from afar, so this magazine shows us the significance of world events in the light of Bible prophecies. It comforts people with the good news that God's Kingdom, which is a real government in heaven, will soon bring an end to all wickedness and transform the earth into a paradise. It promotes faith in Jesus Christ, who died so that we might gain everlasting life and who is now ruling as King of God's Kingdom. This magazine has been published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879 and is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

This publication is not for sale. It is provided as part of a worldwide Bible educational work supported by voluntary donations. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the modern-language *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References*.

PURPOSE OF STUDY ARTICLES



STUDY ARTICLES 1, 2 PAGES 7-15 ▲

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul referred to an aspect of "the good news" that concerns sinful mankind. What is it, and how can you benefit from that aspect of "the good news"? These two articles will deepen your understanding of and your gratitude for Jesus' sacrifice and for God's love expressed through it.

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These articles point out how elders can enhance their appreciation for the privilege of shepherding. Also considered are ways for the congregation to show earnest regard for the elders.

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Should Youths Get Baptized?

“I AM so happy that my daughter is now a servant of Jehovah, and I know that she is happy too,” said Carlos,* a Christian father in the Philippines. A father from Greece wrote: “My wife and I are delighted that our three children were baptized as Jehovah’s Witnesses during their adolescence. They are making spiritual progress and are happy about serving Jehovah.”

Christian parents have reason to be overjoyed when their children get baptized, but sometimes the joy is accompanied by uneasiness. “I was very happy and very anxious,” said one mother. Why the mixed emotions? “I understood that my son was now fully accountable to Jehovah.”

Serving Jehovah as one of his baptized Witnesses is a goal that all young ones should have. Yet, godly parents may wonder, ‘I know that my child has made good

* Some names have been changed.

progress, but is he strong enough to resist immoral pressures and remain clean before Jehovah?’ Others may ask themselves, ‘In facing the pull of materialism, will my child continue serving God with joy and zeal?’ Accordingly, what Biblical guidance can help parents determine whether their children are ready for baptism?

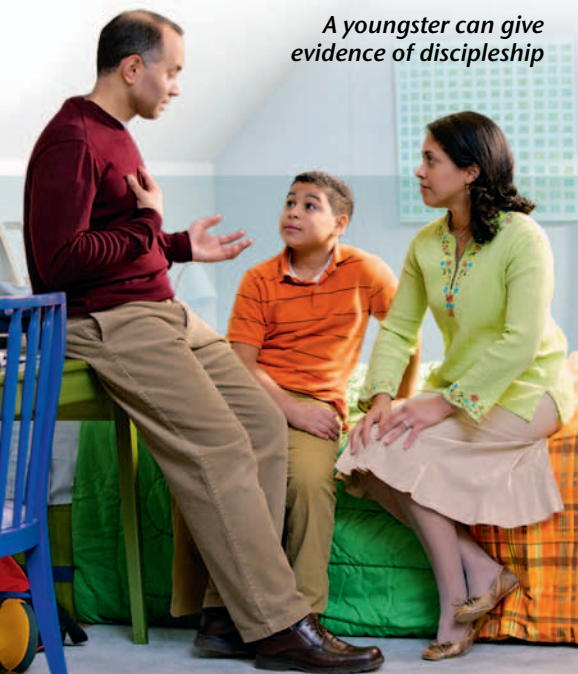
Discipleship

—The Prime Requirement

Instead of specifying an age to get baptized, God’s Word describes the spiritual condition of those qualified to take that step. Jesus instructed his followers: “Make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them.” (Matt. 28:19) Hence, baptism is for those who are already disciples of Christ.

What is a disciple? *Insight on the Scriptures* explains: “The principal application of the term is to all those who not only believe Christ’s teachings but also follow them closely.” Are relatively young people capable of being genuine disciples of Christ? A sister who has served as a missionary in Latin America for over 40 years writes about herself and her two sisters: “We were old

A youngster can give evidence of discipleship



Preparation for and participation at meetings



enough to know that we wanted to serve Jehovah and live in Paradise. Our dedication helped us to be strong when we faced the temptations of youth. We do not regret having made our dedication to God at an early age.”

How do you know if your child has become a disciple of Christ? The Bible states: “Even by his practices a boy makes himself recognized as to whether his activity is pure and upright.” (Prov. 20:11) Consider some practices that reveal that a youth is making ‘his advancement manifest’ as a disciple. —1 Tim. 4:15.

Proof of Discipleship

Does your child obey you? (Col. 3:20) Does he do his assigned chores around the house? The Bible states about 12-year-old Jesus: “He continued subject to [his parents].” (Luke 2:51) Of course, no child today will obey his parents perfectly. But true Christians are to “follow [Jesus’] steps closely.” So youths interested in baptism should be known for their obedience to their parents. —1 Pet. 2:21.

Consider the following questions: Does your child ‘keep seeking first the Kingdom’ in the ministry? (Matt. 6:33) Is he willing to share the good news with others, or do you have to give him strong encouragement to

go out in the field service and talk at the doors? Is he mindful of his responsibility as an unbaptized publisher? Does he have a desire to call back on interested ones he meets in the territory? Does he make known to schoolmates and teachers that he is a Witness of Jehovah?

Is attending congregation meetings important to him? (Ps. 122:1) Does he enjoy commenting at the *Watchtower* Study and the Congregation Bible Study? Is he enthusiastically participating in the Theocratic Ministry School?—Heb. 10:24, 25.

Does your child strive to stay clean morally by avoiding harmful associates in school and elsewhere? (Prov. 13:20) What are his preferences regarding music, movies, television programs, video games, and the use of the Internet? Do his words and actions give evidence that he wants to comply with Bible standards?

How well does your child know the Bible? Can he put in his own words what he learns during your Family Worship evening? Can he explain basic Bible truths? (Prov. 2:6-9) Does reading the Bible and studying the publications of the faithful and discreet slave class interest him? (Matt. 24:45) Does he ask questions about Bible teachings and verses?

Obedience to parents



Participation in the ministry



Personal prayer



Those questions may help you to gauge the spiritual progress of your child. After considering them, you may conclude that he should improve in some area before getting baptized. If, however, his life course gives proof of discipleship and he has indeed dedicated his life to God, you may feel that you can allow him to get baptized.

Young People Can Praise Jehovah

Many servants of God showed faithfulness and loyalty during adolescence or earlier. Think of Joseph, Samuel, Josiah, and Jesus. (Gen. 37:2; 39:1-3; 1 Sam. 1:24-28; 2:18-20; 2 Chron. 34:1-3; Luke 2:42-49) And Philip's four daughters, who prophesied, must have been well-trained from an early age.—Acts 21:8, 9.

A Witness in Greece said: "I was baptized when I was 12 years old. I have never regretted my decision. Since then, 24 years have passed, 23 of which I have spent in the full-time service. My love for Jehovah always helped me to face the difficulties of youth. At the age of 12, I did not have the Scriptural knowledge that I have now. But I knew that I loved Jehovah and wanted to serve him for-

ever. I am glad that he has helped me to continue in his service."

Whether young or old, a person who gives evidence of true discipleship should get baptized. The apostle Paul wrote: "With the heart one exercises faith for righteousness, but with the mouth one makes public declaration for salvation." (Rom. 10:10) When a young disciple of Christ takes the important step of baptism, both he and his parents have reached a milestone. May nothing deprive you or your children of the joy that awaits you.

The Proper View of Baptism

Some parents consider their children's baptism as a beneficial step that involves risk—much like getting a driver's license. But do baptism and sacred service ever threaten a person's future success? The Bible answers no. Proverbs 10:22 states: "The blessing of Jehovah—that is what makes rich, and he adds no pain with it." And Paul wrote to young Timothy: "To be sure, it is a means of great gain, this godly devotion along with self-sufficiency." —1 Tim. 6:6.

True, serving Jehovah is not easy. Jeremiah faced many hardships in his work as God's prophet. Yet, he wrote about his worship of the true God: "Your word becomes to me the exultation and the rejoicing of my heart; for your name has been called upon me, O Jehovah God of armies." (Jer. 15:16) Jeremiah knew that God's service was the source of his joy. Satan's world is a source of hardships. Parents need to help their children to recognize that distinction.—Jer. 1:19.



Should My Child Put Off Baptism?

Occasionally, even when children qualify for baptism, their parents may decide that it should be postponed. What may be their reasons?

I fear that if my child gets baptized, he might later fall into serious sin and get disfellowshipped. Is it reasonable to believe that a young person who puts off baptism will not be accountable to God for his conduct? Solomon directed the following words to young ones: "Know that on account of [your actions] the true God will bring you into judgment." (Eccl. 11:9) And with no exception as to age, Paul gave this reminder: "Each of us will render an account for himself to God." —Rom. 14:12.

Both baptized and unbaptized worshippers are accountable to God. Do not forget, Jehovah protects his servants by 'not letting them be tempted beyond what they can bear.' (1 Cor. 10:13) As long as they 'keep their senses' and fight temptation, such ones can count on God's support. (1 Pet. 5:6-9) A Christian mother writes: "Children who are baptized have more reasons to stay away from the bad things of the world. My son, baptized at 15, feels that baptism is a protection. 'You don't think about doing something contrary to Jehovah's law,' he said. Baptism is a strong motivation for righteousness."

If you have trained your children by word and example to obey Jehovah, you can be confident that they will continue to do so after they are baptized. Proverbs 20:7 states: "The righteous is walking in his integrity. Happy are his sons after him."

I would like to see my child reach certain goals first. Young people should

learn to work so that, in time, they can be self-sufficient. But there is danger in encouraging them to take up a lifestyle centered on education and financial security instead of true worship. Regarding a "seed," or the word of the Kingdom, that does not grow, Jesus said: "As for the one sown among the thorns, this is the one hearing the word, but the anxiety of this system of things and the deceptive power of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful." (Matt. 13:22) Plans for a life that subordinates spirituality to worldly goals can snuff out a young person's desire to serve God.

Commenting on youths who qualify for baptism but whose parents do not agree, an experienced elder said: "Preventing a young one from getting baptized can break his spiritual momentum and lead to discouragement." And a traveling overseer wrote: "A youth could begin feeling spiritually insecure or inferior. He might look to the world to gain a feeling of accomplishment."

Should university come first?



THERE IS GOOD NEWS THAT ALL NEED

“The good news . . . is, in fact, God’s power for salvation.”—ROM. 1:16.

I AM happy to share the good news each day.’ Likely that sentiment has crossed your mind or lips. As a devoted Witness of Jehovah, you know how important it is to preach “this good news of the kingdom.” You may be able to recite from memory Jesus’ prophecy about our doing that.—Matt. 24:14.

² In preaching the “good news of the kingdom,” you are continuing what Jesus started. (**Read Luke 4:43.**) Doubtless, one point that you stress is that God will soon intervene in human affairs. With the “great tribulation,” he will end false religion and clear the earth of wickedness. (Matt. 24:21) You probably also highlight that God’s Kingdom will reestablish Paradise on earth so that peace and happiness can flourish. In fact, the “good news of the kingdom” is part of “the good news [declared] beforehand to Abraham, namely: ‘By means of you all the nations will be blessed.’”—Gal. 3:8.

³ Could it be, though, that we might give little attention to a key aspect of the good news that people need? In the letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul used the word “kingdom” only once, but he used the expression “good news” 12 times. (**Read Romans 14:17.**) What aspect of the good news did Paul refer to so often in that book? Why is that particular good news vital? And why

1, 2. Why do you preach the “good news of the kingdom,” and what aspects of it do you stress?

3. Why can we say that the apostle Paul emphasized good news in the book of Romans?

should we keep it in mind as we preach “the good news of God” to people in our territory?—Mark 1:14; Rom. 15:16; 1 Thess. 2:2.

What Those in Rome Needed

⁴ It is instructive to note the topics that Paul addressed when he was first imprisoned in Rome. We read that when a number of Jews visited him, he bore ‘thorough witness concerning (1) *the kingdom of God* and used persuasion with them concerning (2) *Jesus*.’ The result? “Some began to believe the things said; others would

4. During his first imprisonment in Rome, about what did Paul preach?



not believe.” Thereafter, Paul ‘would kindly receive all those who came in to him, preaching (1) *the kingdom of God* to them and teaching the things concerning (2) *the Lord Jesus Christ*.’ (Acts 28:17, 23-31) Clearly, Paul gave attention to God’s Kingdom. But what else did he stress? Something that is central to the Kingdom—Jesus’ role in God’s purpose.

⁵ All people need to know about Jesus and put faith in him. In the book of Romans, Paul addressed this need. Early on, he wrote

The good news highlighted in Romans involved Jesus’ vital role in God’s purpose

of “God, to whom I render sacred service with my spirit in connection with *the good news about his Son*.” He added: “I am not ashamed of the good news; it is, in fact, God’s power for salvation to everyone having faith.” Later he referred to the time “when God through Christ Jesus judges the secret things of mankind, according to the good news I declare.” And he related: “From Jerusalem and in a circuit as far as Illyricum I have thoroughly preached *the good news about the Christ*.”* (Rom. 1:9, 16; 2:16; 15:19) Why, do you think, did Paul stress Jesus Christ to the Romans?

⁶ We do not know how the Roman congregation started. Did Jews or proselytes who were present at Pentecost 33 C.E. return to Rome as Christians? (Acts 2:10) Or did

* Similar expressions appear in other inspired books.—Mark 1:1; Acts 5:42; 1 Cor. 9:12; Phil. 1:27.

5. What real need did Paul address in the book of Romans?

6, 7. What can we say about the start and makeup of the Roman congregation?

Christian merchants and travelers spread the truth in Rome? Whatever the case, by the time Paul wrote the book, about 56 C.E., the congregation was long established. (Rom. 1:8) What type of people made up that congregation?

⁷ Some had a Jewish background. Paul greeted Andronicus and Junias as “my relatives,” likely meaning relatives who were fellow Jews. Tentmaker Aquila, in Rome with his wife, Priscilla, was also Jewish. (Rom. 4:1; 9:3, 4; 16:3, 7; Acts 18:2) But many brothers and sisters to whom Paul sent greetings were likely Gentiles. Some may have been “of the household of Caesar,” perhaps meaning Caesar’s slaves and minor officials.—Phil. 4:22; Rom. 1:6; 11:13.

⁸ Every Christian in Rome faced a predicament that also confronts each one of us. Paul put it this way: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23) Clearly, all to whom Paul wrote needed to recognize that they were sinners and had to put faith in God’s means to meet that need.

Recognizing the Problem of Sin

⁹ Early in the letter to the Romans, Paul pointed to the wonderful result that could come from the good news he kept mentioning: “I am not ashamed of the good news; it is, in fact, God’s power for *salvation* to everyone having faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” Yes, salvation was possible. However, faith was necessary, in line with a profound truth quoted from Habakkuk 2:4: “The righteous one—by means of faith he will live.” (Rom. 1:16, 17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38) But how does that good news, which can lead to salvation, relate to the fact that “all have sinned”?

8. Those in Rome faced what predicament?

9. Paul called attention to what possible result of the good news?

¹⁰ Before a person can develop lifesaving faith, he must acknowledge that he is a sinner. The idea of being such would not be strange for those who grow up believing in God and having some familiarity with the Bible. (**Read Ecclesiastes 7:20.**) Whether they agree or have doubts, at least they have an idea of what Paul meant when he said: “All have sinned.” (Rom. 3:23) Yet, in carrying out our ministry, we may meet many who do not understand that statement.

¹¹ In some lands, the average person is not raised thinking that he (or she) was born a sinner, that he inherited sin. Granted, he probably realizes that he makes mistakes, has undesirable traits, and may have done some bad things. And he observes that others are in a similar situation. Still, given his background, he does not really understand why he and others are like that. In fact, in some languages, if you say that a person is a sinner, others may think that you are saying that he is a criminal or at least a person who broke some rules. Obviously, a person growing up in such an environment may not readily think of himself as a sinner in the sense that Paul meant.

¹² Even in lands of Christendom, many do not believe in the concept of being sinners. Why not? Even if they go to church on occasion, they consider the Bible account of Adam and Eve to be merely a fable or a myth. Others grow up in an anti-God climate. They doubt that God exists and therefore do not understand that a Supreme Being set moral standards for humans and that failure to uphold those standards amounts to sin. In a sense, they are like those in the first century whom Paul described as having



“no hope” and being “without God in the world.”—Eph. 2:12.

¹³ In the letter to the Romans, Paul presented two reasons why such a background cannot be an excuse—not then, not today. The first reason is that creation itself bears witness to the existence of a Creator. (**Read Romans 1:19, 20.**) This accords with an observation Paul made when writing from Rome to the Hebrews: “Every house is constructed by someone, but he that constructed all things is God.” (Heb. 3:4) That line of reasoning points to there being a Creator who constructed, or brought into existence, the entire universe.

¹⁴ So Paul was on solid ground in writing to the Romans that any—including the ancient Israelites—who gave their devotion to lifeless images “are inexcusable.” The same can be said for those who gave in to immoral sexual practices contrary to the natural use of the male and female bodies. (Rom. 1:22-27) Referring to such reasoning, Paul rightly concluded that “Jews as well as Greeks are all under sin.”—Rom. 3:9.

10, 11. Why is the concept mentioned at Romans 3:23 not strange for some people but is for others?

12. Why do many not believe that all are sinners?

13, 14. (a) What is one reason why those who do not believe in God and in sin are inexcusable? (b) To what has disbelief led many?

A ‘Witness Bearer’

¹⁵ The book of Romans identifies another reason why people should recognize that they are sinners and need a way out of that predicament. Regarding the code of laws that God gave to ancient Israel, Paul wrote: “All those who sinned under law will be judged by law.” (Rom. 2:12) Continuing his reasoning, he points out that people of nations or ethnic groups unacquainted with that divine code often “do by nature the things of the law.” Why do such ones commonly forbid incest, murder, and stealing? Paul identified the reason: They have a conscience.—**Read Romans 2:14, 15.**

¹⁶ Nonetheless, you have likely seen that having a conscience that functions like an inner witness bearer does not mean that a person will follow its guidance. The case of ancient Israel shows that. Though the Israelites had both a God-given conscience and specific laws from God against stealing and adultery, they often violated both their conscience and Jehovah’s Law. (Rom. 2:21-23) They were doubly culpable and thus certainly were sinners, falling short of God’s standards and will. This seriously marred their relationship with their Maker.—Lev. 19:11; 20:10; Rom. 3:20.

¹⁷ What we have considered from the book of Romans might seem to paint a grim picture of the human situation before the Almighty, including ours. However, Paul did not leave matters there. Quoting David’s words at Psalm 32:1, 2, the apostle wrote: “Happy are those whose lawless deeds have been pardoned and whose sins have been covered; happy is the man whose sin Jeho-

15. Who have the faculty of conscience, with what effect?

16. Why does having a conscience not necessarily mean avoiding sin?

17. We find what encouragement in the book of Romans?

Do You Recall?

- The book of Romans highlights what aspect of the good news?
- What fact do we need to help others to understand?
- How can “the good news about the Christ” mean blessings for us and others?

vah will by no means take into account.” (Rom. 4:7, 8) Yes, God has arranged a legally proper means for pardoning sins.

Good News Centered on Jesus

¹⁸ You might well respond, “That is really good news!” Indeed it is, which brings us back to the aspect of the good news that Paul highlighted in the book of Romans. As mentioned, Paul wrote: “I am not ashamed of the good news; it is, in fact, God’s power for salvation.”—Rom. 1:15, 16.

¹⁹ That good news centered on Jesus’ role in the outworking of God’s purpose. Paul could look forward to “the day when God through Christ Jesus judges the secret things of mankind, according to the good news.” (Rom. 2:16) In stating that, he was not minimizing “the kingdom of the Christ and of God” or what God will do by means of the Kingdom. (Eph. 5:5) But he showed that for us to live and enjoy the blessings to prevail under God’s Kingdom, we must recognize (1) our situation as sinners in God’s sight and (2) why we need to exercise faith in Jesus Christ to have our sins forgiven. When a person comes to understand and accept those parts of God’s purpose and sees the future that this opens to him, he can rightly exclaim, “Yes, that truly is good news!”

18, 19. (a) On what aspect of the good news did Paul focus in Romans? (b) To get Kingdom blessings, we must recognize what?

²⁰ We should definitely bear in mind this aspect of the good news as we carry out our Christian ministry. With reference to Jesus, Paul quoted Isaiah's words: "None that rests his faith on him will be disappointed." (Rom. 10:11; Isa. 28:16) The basic message about Jesus may not be strange to those who are acquainted with what the Bible says about sin. For others, though, this message will be quite new, something not known or generally believed in their culture. As such ones come to believe in God and trust in the

20, 21. In our ministry, why should we bear in mind the good news that is stressed in the book of Romans, and with what potential result?

Scriptures, we will need to explain Jesus' role. The following article will consider how Romans chapter 5 develops this aspect of the good news. You will probably find that study to be useful in your ministry.

²¹ How rewarding it is to help honesthearted ones to understand the good news mentioned repeatedly in the book of Romans, the good news that "is, in fact, God's power for salvation to everyone having faith." (Rom. 1:16) Beyond our being thus rewarded, we will see others agree with the sentiment that Paul quoted at Romans 10:15: "How comely are the feet of those who declare good news of good things!"—Isa. 52:7.

GOD RECOMMENDS HIS LOVE TO US

"Undeserved kindness [will] rule as king through righteousness with everlasting life in view."—ROM. 5:21.

"THE Romans' greatest . . . bequest to those who succeeded them [was] their law and their sense that life should be lived according to law." (Dr. David J. Williams of the University of Melbourne, Australia) However valid that might be, there is a bequest or gift of far greater value. This gift is a divine means to have an approved and righteous standing with God and the prospect of salvation and everlasting life.

² In a sense, there were legal aspects to how God made this gift available. In Ro—
1, 2. What two gifts might be considered, and which is the greater?

mans chapter 5, the apostle Paul did not present these aspects as a dry, legalistic treatise. Rather, he began with this thrilling assurance: "We have been declared righteous as a result of faith, [so] let us enjoy peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Those who receive God's gift are moved to love him in return. Paul was one. He wrote: "The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy spirit."—Rom. 5:1, 5.

³ Why, though, was this loving gift necessary? How could God offer it in a just,

3. What questions logically arise?

equitable way? And what are individuals called upon to do to qualify for it? Let us find the satisfying answers and see how they underscore God's love.

God's Love Versus Sin

⁴ In an act of great love, Jehovah sent his only-begotten Son to help humans. Paul expressed it this way: "God recommends his own love to us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8) Think of one fact there mentioned: "We were yet sinners." All need to know how that came to be so.

⁵ Paul outlined the matter, starting with this point: "Through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men because they had all sinned." (Rom. 5:12) We are in a position to understand this because God had a record made of how human life began. Jehovah created two humans, Adam and Eve. The Creator is perfect, and so were those first humans, our ancestors. God gave them but one limiting directive and informed them that disobeying that law would bring a death sentence. (Gen. 2:17) However, they chose to act ruinously, violating God's reasonable directive, thus rejecting him as Lawgiver and Sovereign.—Deut. 32:4, 5.

⁶ It was only after Adam had become a sinner that he fathered children, passing on sin and its effects to all of them. Of course, they had not violated the divine law as Adam had, so they were not charged with the same sin; nor had any law code yet been given. (Gen. 2:17) Still, Adam's descendants inherited

4, 5. (a) In what great way did Jehovah express his love? (b) Knowledge of what background enables us to understand Romans 5:12?

6. (a) Why did Adam's descendants die both before God gave the Mosaic Law and thereafter? (b) What can be illustrated with a disease like hemophilia?

sin. Thus, sin and death ruled down to the time when God gave the Israelites a law code, which clearly showed that they were sinners. (**Read Romans 5:13, 14.**) The effect of inherited sin might be illustrated with certain inherited diseases or defects, such as Mediterranean anemia or hemophilia. You may have read that Alexis, son of Russian Czar Nicholas II and Alexandra, inherited the bleeding disorder hemophilia. Granted, even in such a family, some children do not suffer from those diseases, but they still may be carriers. Not so with sin. The defect of sin from Adam was inevitable. All are subject to it. It is always fatal. And it is passed on to all children. Could that predicament ever be overcome?

What God Provided Through Jesus Christ

⁷ Lovingly, Jehovah made a provision for humans to overcome inherited sinfulness. Paul explained that this was possible by means of another man, a later perfect man—in effect, a second Adam. (1 Cor. 15:45) But the course of each of the two perfect men has led to very different results. How so?—**Read Romans 5:15, 16.**

⁸ "It is not with the gift as it was with the trespass," Paul wrote. Adam was guilty of that trespass, and he justly received an adverse sentence—he died. Yet, he was not the only one to die. We read: "By [that] one man's trespass many died." The just sentence on Adam demanded the same for all his imperfect progeny, including us. Still, we can take comfort in knowing that the perfect man, Jesus, could produce an opposite result. What is the result? We see the answer in Paul's mention of "a declaring of [men of all kinds] righteous *for life*."—Rom. 5:18.

7, 8. How did the course of two perfect men lead to different results?



***The perfect man Adam sinned.
The perfect man Jesus offered
“a corresponding ransom”***

⁹ What is the sense of the Greek words underlying the expressions “declaration of righteousness” and “declaring of them righteous”? One Bible translator wrote of the concept: “It is a legal metaphor that makes a quasi-legal point. It speaks of a change in a person’s status in relation to God, not of an inner change in the person . . . The metaphor pictures God as the judge who has reached a decision in favor of the accused, who had been brought before God’s court, so to speak, on a charge of unrighteousness. But God acquits the accused.”

¹⁰ On what basis could the righteous “Judge of all the earth” acquit an unrighteous person? (Gen. 18:25) Laying the groundwork, God lovingly sent his only-

9. God was doing what in declaring men righteous, as mentioned at Romans 5:16, 18?

10. What did Jesus do that provided the basis for humans to be declared righteous?

begotten Son to earth. Jesus did his Father’s will perfectly, despite temptations, extreme ridicule, and abuse. He kept his integrity even to the extent of dying on a torture stake. (Heb. 2:10) In sacrificing his perfect human life, Jesus offered a ransom that might release, or redeem, Adam’s offspring from sin and death.—Matt. 20:28; Rom. 5:6-8.

¹¹ Elsewhere, Paul termed this “a corresponding ransom.” (1 Tim. 2:6) What was the correspondence? Adam brought imperfection and death to billions, his descendants. It is true that Jesus, as a perfect man, could have been the source of billions of perfect descendants.* Hence, it was understood that a combination of Jesus’ life plus that of all his potential perfect descendants formed a sacrifice equivalent to that of Adam and his imperfect descendants. However, the Bible does not say that any potential offspring of Jesus formed part of the ransom. Romans 5: 15-19 makes the point that the death of just “one man” provided the release. Yes, Jesus’ perfect life corresponded to Adam’s. The focus is, and should be, on Jesus Christ alone. It became possible for men of all sorts to receive the free gift and life because of Jesus’ “one act of justification,” his course of obedience and integrity even to death. (2 Cor. 5:14, 15; 1 Pet. 3:18) How did that result come about?

Acquittal Based on the Ransom

¹² Jehovah God accepted the ransom sacrifice that his Son offered. (Heb. 9:24; 10:10, 12) Still, Jesus’ disciples on earth, including his faithful apostles, remained imperfect. Though they strove to avoid doing wrong,

* For example, that view involving descendants, or progeny, was included in *Insight on the Scriptures*, Volume 2, page 736, paragraphs 4 and 5.

11. The ransom is based on what correspondence?
12, 13. Why do those who are declared righteous need God’s mercy and love?

they did not always succeed. Why? Because they had inherited sin. (Rom. 7:18-20) But God could and did do something about that. He accepted the “corresponding ransom” and was willing to apply it in behalf of his human servants.

¹³ It is not that God owed it to the apostles and others to apply the ransom because they had performed certain good works. Instead, God applied the ransom in their behalf out of his mercy and great love. He chose to acquit the apostles and others of the judgment against them, viewing them as absolved of inherited guilt. Paul made that plain: “By this undeserved kindness, indeed, you have been saved through faith; and this not owing to you, it is God’s gift.”—Eph. 2:8.

¹⁴ Think what a gift it is for the Almighty to forgive the sin a person inherited as well as the wrongs he committed! You could not count how many sins individuals committed before becoming Christians; yet, on the basis of the ransom, God can forgive those sins. Paul wrote: “The gift resulted from many trespasses in a declaration of righteousness.” (Rom. 5:16) The apostles and others receiving this loving gift (being declared righteous) would have to continue to worship the true God in faith. With what future reward? “Those who receive the abundance of the undeserved kindness and of the free gift of righteousness [will] rule as kings in life through the one person, Jesus Christ.” Indeed, the gift of righteousness works in the opposite direction. The gift has life as its outcome.—Rom. 5:17; **read Luke 22:28-30.**

¹⁵ Those receiving that gift, being declared righteous, become God’s spiritual sons. As joint heirs with Christ, they have

14, 15. What reward was placed before those whom God declared righteous, but what did they still need to do?

the prospect of being resurrected to heaven as actual spirit sons to “rule as kings” with Jesus Christ.—**Read Romans 8:15-17, 23.**

God’s Love Manifest to Others

¹⁶ Not all who exercise faith and serve God as loyal Christians expect to “rule as kings” with Christ in heaven. Many have a Bible-based hope similar to that of God’s pre-Christian servants. They hope to live forever on a paradise earth. Can they even now receive a loving gift from God and be viewed as righteous with earthly life in view? Based on what Paul wrote to the Romans, the reassuring answer is yes!

¹⁷ Paul discussed a prime example, Abraham, a man of faith who lived before Jehovah provided a law code to Israel and long before Christ opened the way to heavenly life. (Heb. 10:19, 20) We read: “It was not through law that Abraham or his seed had the promise that he should be heir of a world, but it was through the righteousness by faith.” (Rom. 4:13; Jas. 2:23, 24) So God counted faithful Abraham as righteous.—**Read Romans 4:20-22.**

¹⁸ That cannot mean that Abraham was sinless while serving Jehovah over the decades. No, he was not righteous in that sense. (Rom. 3:10, 23) However, in his limitless wisdom, Jehovah took into account Abraham’s exceptional faith and his works resulting therefrom. In particular, Abraham exercised faith in the promised “seed” to come in his line. That Seed proved to be the Messiah, or Christ. (Gen. 15:6; 22:15-18) Accordingly, on the basis of “the ransom paid by Christ Jesus,” the divine Judge is able to

16. How might ones with an earthly hope receive a gift?

17, 18. (a) In view of Abraham’s faith, how did God consider him? (b) How was it that Jehovah could view Abraham as righteous?

*What good news
—by means of Jesus we can
be declared righteous!*

forgive sins that occurred in the past. Thus, Abraham and other men of faith in pre-Christian times are in line for a resurrection.—**Read Romans 3:24, 25; Ps. 32:1, 2.**

Enjoy a Righteous Standing Now

¹⁹ The fact that the God of love counted Abraham as righteous should be heartening for true Christians today. Jehovah did not declare him righteous in the sense that he does those whom he anoints with spirit to be “joint heirs with Christ.” The limited number of that group are “called to be holy ones” and are accepted as “God’s sons.” (Rom. 1:7; 8:14, 17, 33) In contrast, Abraham came to be “Jehovah’s friend”—and that before the ransom sacrifice was offered. (Jas. 2: 23; Isa. 41:8) What, then, about true Christians who hope to live in the restored earthly Paradise?

²⁰ These have not received “the free gift of righteousness” with heavenly life in view “through the release by the ransom paid by Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 3:24; 5:15, 17) Nevertheless, they exercise deep faith in God and his provisions, and they manifest their faith by good works. One such work is that of “preaching the kingdom of God . . . and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 28:31) Thus, Jehovah can view these as righteous in the sense that he did Abraham. The gift such ones receive

19. Why should God’s view of Abraham be heartening to many today?

20. God expects what of those whom he today views as righteous, as he did Abraham?



—friendship with God—differs from “the free gift” the anointed receive. Yet, it certainly is a gift that they accept with deep gratitude.

²¹ If you hope to enjoy everlasting life on earth, you should realize that this opportunity has not come to you because of a capricious act by a human ruler. Rather, it reflects the wise purpose of the Universal Sovereign. Jehovah has taken progressive steps to accomplish his purpose. These steps have been in line with true justice. More than that, they have reflected God’s great love. Well could Paul say: “God recommends his own love to us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”—Rom. 5:8.

21. What benefits are available because of Jehovah’s love and justice?

Do You Recall?

- Adam’s progeny received what inheritance, and with what result?
- How was a corresponding ransom provided, and in what sense was there a correspondence?
- The gift of being declared righteous brought what prospect to you?

Did Abraham Really Own Camels?

CAMELS were among the domestic animals that Abraham received from Pharaoh, says the Bible. (Gen. 12:16) When Abraham's servant went on a long journey to Mesopotamia, he "took ten camels from the camels of his master." So the Bible clearly states that Abraham owned camels about the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E.—Gen. 24:10.

Some do not accept this. The *New International Version Archaeological Study Bible* reports: "Scholars have debated the historicity of these references to camels because most believe that





these animals were not widely domesticated until approximately 1200 B.C., long after the time of Abraham.” Any earlier Biblical reference to camels would therefore be considered an anachronism, or a chronological misplacing.

Other scholars, however, argue that although the domestication of camels became a factor of importance about the end of the second millennium, this does not mean that camels were not used earlier. The book *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* states: “Recent research has suggested that the domestication of the camel took place in southeastern Arabia some time in the third millennium [B.C.E.]. Originally, it was probably bred for its milk, hair, leather, and meat, but it cannot have been long before its usefulness as a beast of burden became apparent.” This dating to before Abraham’s time seems to be supported by bone fragments and other archaeological remains.

Written evidence also exists. The same reference work says: “In Mesopotamia, cuneiform lists mention the creature [the camel] and several seals depict it, indicating that the animal may have reached Mesopotamia by the beginning of the second millennium,” that is, by Abraham’s time.

Some scholars believe that South Arabian merchants involved in the incense trade used camels to transport their goods northward through the desert, heading to such areas as Egypt and Syria and thereby introducing camels to these areas. This trade was probably common as early as 2000 B.C.E. Interestingly, Genesis 37:25-28 mentions Ishmaelite merchants who used camels to transport incense to Egypt about a hundred years after the time of Abraham.

Perhaps camels were not widely used in the ancient Near East at the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E., but evidence seems to confirm that they were not completely unknown. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* therefore concludes: “It is no longer necessary to regard the mention of camels in the patriarchal narratives as anachronisms, since there is ample archeological evidence for the domestication of the camel before the time of the patriarchs.”



'Bring the Scrolls, Especially the Parchments'

WITH the above words, the apostle Paul urged his fellow missionary Timothy to bring him some written material. To what kinds of scrolls and parchments was Paul referring? What led him to say this? And what can we learn from this request?

By the middle of the first century C.E. when Paul wrote these words, the 39 books of the Hebrew Scriptures had been divided into either 22 or 24 books, most of which were likely in separate scrolls. Professor Alan Millard noted that these scrolls, though expensive, were “not . . . out of the reach of the reasonably well-to-do.” Some had access to at least one of them. For example, the Ethiopian eunuch had a scroll in his chariot and was “reading aloud the prophet Isaiah.” He was ‘in power under Candace queen of the Ethiopians and was over all her treasure.’ He must have been wealthy enough to own portions of the Scriptures.—Acts 8:27, 28.

In his request to Timothy, Paul wrote: “When you come, bring the cloak I left at Troas with Carpus, and the scrolls, especially the parchments.” (2 Tim. 4:13) This suggests that Paul owned a number of books. What would have had a higher place in his library than the Word of God? Regarding the word

“parchments” in this verse, Bible scholar A. T. Robertson observed: “These in particular would likely be copies of Old Testament books, parchment being more expensive than papyrus.” From youth on, Paul was “educated . . . at the feet of Gamaliel,” who taught the Mosaic Law and was esteemed by all the people. So it is understandable that Paul would have obtained personal copies of the scrolls of God’s Word.—Acts 5:34; 22:3.

Christians’ Use of Scrolls

Still, those who owned scrolls of the Holy Scriptures were privileged. How, then, did most of the Christians in those days gain access to the Word of God? Paul’s earlier letter to Timothy gives us a hint. He wrote: “While I am coming, continue applying yourself to public reading.” (1 Tim. 4:13) Public reading was a part of the meeting program of Christian congregations, a traditional practice among God’s people since the time of Moses.—Acts 13:15; 15:21; 2 Cor. 3:15.

As an elder, Timothy had to ‘apply himself’ to reading out loud, which would benefit those who did not own copies of the Scriptures. Surely, during the public reading of the Word of God, all listened attentively

so as not to miss a word, and parents and children must have discussed at home what was read at the meetings.

The well-known Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah is almost 24 feet (7.3 m) in length. With a rod at each end and often with a cover for protection, a scroll would be heavy. Probably most Christians could not carry many with them for preaching. Even if Paul possessed some scrolls of the Scriptures for his personal use, he likely could not take on his travels all the scrolls he owned. Evidently he left some with his friend Carpus in Troas.

What Can We Learn From Paul's Example?

Just before making his request, Paul, imprisoned in Rome for a second time, wrote: "I have fought the fine fight, I have run the course to the finish . . . From this time on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness." (2 Tim. 4:7, 8) He likely wrote these words about 65 C.E. during the persecution by Nero. This time the imprisonment was very severe. In fact, he sensed that his execution was imminent. (2 Tim. 1:16; 4:6) Understandably, Paul expressed his heartfelt desire to have his scrolls on hand. Though he was confident that he had fought the fine fight to the finish, he longed to continue strengthening himself by studying the Word of God.

Timothy was probably still in Ephesus when he received Paul's request. (1 Tim. 1:3) From Ephesus to Rome via Troas is roughly 1,000 miles (1,600 km). In the same letter, Paul urged Timothy: "Do your utmost to arrive before winter." (2 Tim. 4:21) The Bible does not reveal whether Timothy found a boat to get him to Rome by the time Paul desired.

What can we learn from Paul's request for "the scrolls, especially the parchments"? He

maintained a longing for God's Word during this most distressing period of his life. Do you not see this as a secret to his always being spiritually alive and active as well as his being a source of encouragement to many?

Today, how blessed we are if we own a personal copy of the complete Bible! Some of us even have several copies and editions. Like Paul, we need to cultivate eagerness to gain a deeper understanding of the Scriptures. Of the 14 inspired letters Paul was privileged to write, his second to Timothy was the last. His personal request appears toward the end of the book. In fact, Paul's entreaty to Timothy 'to bring the scrolls, especially the parchments,' was one of his final wishes on record.

Is it your ardent desire to fight the fine fight of the faith to the finish, just as Paul did? Do you want to keep yourself spiritually stimulated and prepared to engage in the witnessing work for as long as the Lord wants us to continue? Then why not do as Paul encouraged Christians to do? "Pay constant attention to yourself and to your teaching" by eager and constant study of the Bible, which is now available to more people than ever in forms more convenient than the scrolls.—1 Tim. 4:16.



“SHEPHERD THE FLOCK OF GOD IN YOUR CARE”

“Shepherd the flock of God in your care, not under compulsion, but willingly.”—1 PET. 5:2.

SOMETIME before Nero launched his persecution against Christians in Rome, the apostle Peter wrote his first letter. He wanted to strengthen his fellow believers. The Devil was ‘walking about,’ seeking to devour Christians. To stand firm against him, they needed to ‘keep their senses’ and to ‘humble themselves under the mighty hand of God.’ (1 Pet. 5:6, 8) They also needed to stay united. They could not afford to be “biting and devouring one another,” for that could result in their being “annihilated by one another.”—Gal. 5:15.

² Today, we face a similar situation. The Devil is looking for opportunities to devour us. (Rev. 12:12) And ahead of us looms a “great tribulation such as has not occurred since the world’s beginning.” (Matt. 24:21) Just as first-century Christians had to guard against squabbling among themselves, so must we. To accomplish this, at times we need help from qualified older men.

³ Let us consider how elders can enhance their appreciation for the privilege of shepherding ‘the flock of God in their care.’ (1 Pet. 5:2) Thereafter, we will reflect on the proper way of carrying out the shepherding work. In the next article, we will examine how the congregation can ‘have regard for those who are working hard and presiding

over’ the flock. (1 Thess. 5:12) A consideration of these matters will help us to take a firm stand against our chief Adversary, recognizing that he is the one with whom we have a wrestling.—Eph. 6:12.

Shepherd the Flock of God

⁴ Peter encouraged the older men among the first-century Christians to have a godly view of the flock entrusted to them. (**Read 1 Peter 5:1, 2.**) Although he was considered a pillar in the congregation, Peter did not talk condescendingly to the elders. Rather, he admonished them as fellow elders. (Gal. 2:9) With a spirit like Peter’s, the Governing Body today exhorts congregation elders to strive to fulfill the heavy responsibility of shepherding God’s flock.

⁵ The apostle wrote that the older men were to ‘shepherd the flock of God in their care.’ It was most important for them to recognize that the flock belongs to Jehovah and Jesus Christ. The elders had to render an account about how they kept watch over God’s sheep. Suppose that a close friend of yours asked you to look after his children while he was away. Would you not take good care of them and feed them? If one child got sick, would you not make sure that he received any needed medical help? Similarly, the elders in the congregation are “to shepherd the congregation of God, which he pur-

1. What circumstances were Christians facing when Peter wrote his first letter?

2, 3. Against whom should we be fighting, and what are we going to consider in this series?

4, 5. How should the older men view the flock? Illustrate.



Like shepherds in ancient times, elders today must protect the “sheep” in their care

chased with the blood of his own Son.” (Acts 20:28) They keep in mind that each sheep was bought with the precious blood of Christ Jesus. Being accountable, the elders feed, protect, and care for the flock.

⁶ Think of the responsibilities that literal shepherds had in Bible times. They had to put up with the heat of the day and the cold of the night in order to tend the flock. (Gen. 31:40) They even risked their life for the sheep. The shepherd boy David rescued his flock from wild beasts, including a lion and a bear. With regard to each one, David said that he “grabbed hold of its beard and struck it down and put it to death.” (1 Sam. 17:34, 35) What bravery! How close he must have come to the beast’s jaws! Still, he did not hold back from saving the sheep.

⁷ Today, elders need to be on guard

6. What was the responsibility of ancient shepherds?

7. How may elders snatch the sheep from Satan’s jaws, figuratively speaking?

against the lionlike attacks of the Devil. This may involve a courageous act of figuratively snatching the sheep from the Devil’s jaws. By taking hold of the wild beast by the beard, so to speak, elders can rescue the sheep. They may reason with unwary brothers who are tempted by Satan’s snares. (**Read Jude 22, 23.**) Elders, of course, do not accomplish this without Jehovah’s help. They handle an injured sheep tenderly, bandaging him and applying the soothing balm of God’s Word.

⁸ A literal shepherd also guided the flock to an appropriate pasture and a watering place. Likewise, elders direct the flock to the congregation, encouraging regular meeting attendance so that the flock can be well-fed and receive “their food at the proper time.” (Matt. 24:45) The elders may need to spend extra time helping those who are spiritually sick to accept nourishment from God’s Word. A stray sheep may be trying to return

8. To where do elders guide the flock, and how?

to the flock. Instead of intimidating their brother, the elders tenderly explain Scriptural principles and show him how he can apply these in his life.

⁹ When you are sick, what kind of doctor do you prefer? One who spends little time listening to you and then quickly prescribes medication so as to be free to see the next patient? Or would you rather consult a doctor who hears you out, explains what might be wrong with you, and outlines possible treatments?

¹⁰ Likewise, the elders can listen to the spiritually sick person and help to heal the wound, thus figuratively “greasing him with oil in the name of Jehovah.” (*Read James 5: 14, 15.*) Like the balsam from Gilead, God’s Word can soothe the ailing one. (Jer. 8:22; Ezek. 34:16) When applied, Bible principles can help the faltering one to regain spiritual balance. Yes, the elders do much good once they hear the ailing sheep’s concerns and pray with him.

Not Under Compulsion but Willingly

¹¹ Peter next reminded the older men how the shepherding work should and should not be done. Elders are to shepherd the flock of God, “not under compulsion, but willingly.” What moves elders to serve their brothers willingly? Well, what moved Peter to shepherd and feed Jesus’ sheep? A key was his love and affection for the Lord. (John 21:15-17) Because of love, elders “live no longer for themselves, but for him who died for them.” (2 Cor. 5:14, 15) This love, combined with their love for God and their brothers, compels elders to serve the flock, devoting their efforts, resources, and time to

9, 10. How should elders care for spiritually ailing ones?

11. What moves elders to shepherd the flock of God willingly?

doing so. (Matt. 22:37-39) They give of themselves, not grudgingly, but willingly.

¹² To what extent should the elders give of themselves? In caring for the sheep, they imitate the apostle Paul, even as he imitated Jesus. (1 Cor. 11:1) Having tender affection for the Thessalonian brothers, Paul and his companions were well-pleased to impart to them ‘not only the good news of God but also their own souls.’ When doing so, they became gentle, “as when a nursing mother cherishes her own children.” (1 Thess. 2:7, 8) Paul understood how a nursing mother felt about her children. She would do anything for them, including getting up in the middle of the night to feed them.

¹³ The elders need to take care to maintain balance between shepherding responsibilities and obligations to their own family. (1 Tim. 5:8) The time that elders spend with the congregation is precious time away from their family. One way to balance the two responsibilities is to invite others to their Family Worship evening on occasion. Over the years, Masanao, an elder in Japan, invited single ones and spiritually fatherless families to his family’s study. In time, some who were helped became elders themselves and imitated Masanao’s fine example.

Shun Dishonest Gain —Shepherd the Flock Eagerly

¹⁴ Peter also encouraged elders to shepherd the flock, “neither for love of dishonest gain, but eagerly.” The work of the elders takes up a considerable amount of time, yet they do not expect any financial compensation. Peter saw the need to warn his fellow

12. To what extent did the apostle Paul give of himself?

13. Elders need to maintain what balance?

14, 15. Why should elders guard against the “love of dishonest gain,” and how can they imitate Paul in this regard?

older men about the danger of shepherding the flock out of “love of dishonest gain.” That danger is evident in the life of luxury led by religious leaders of “Babylon the Great” while many people are forced to lead a life of poverty. (Rev. 18:2, 3) The elders today have good reason to be on guard against any tendency in that direction.

¹⁵ Paul set a fine example for Christian elders. Though he was an apostle and could have been “an expensive burden” on Christians in Thessalonica, he did not “eat food from anyone free.” Rather, he ‘labored and toiled night and day.’ (2 Thess. 3:8) Many present-day elders, including those who are in the traveling work, set a fine example in this regard. Although they accept hospitality from fellow believers, they do not “put an expensive burden” upon anyone.—1 Thess. 2:9.

¹⁶ The elders shepherd the flock “eagerly.” Their eagerness is evident in their self-sacrificing attitude in helping the flock. However, that does not mean that they force the flock to serve Jehovah; nor do loving elders encourage others to serve God out of a competitive spirit. (Gal. 5:26) Elders appreciate that each sheep is unique. They are eager to help their brothers to serve Jehovah happily.

Not Lording It Over the Flock but Being Examples

¹⁷ As we have discussed, the elders should keep in mind that the flock they are shepherding is God’s, not their own. They are careful not ‘to lord it over those who are God’s inheritance.’ (*Read 1 Peter 5:3.*) At times, Jesus’ apostles reached out with the wrong motive. Like those who were ruling

16. What does it mean to shepherd the flock “eagerly”?

17, 18. (a) Why did the apostles at times have difficulty grasping Jesus’ teaching on humility? (b) In what similar situation might we find ourselves?

the nations, they wanted to have a prominent position.—*Read Mark 10:42-45.*

¹⁸ Today, brothers who are “reaching out for an office of overseer” do well to examine themselves as to why they are reaching out. (1 Tim. 3:1) Those who are now elders may want to ask themselves frankly whether they have a desire for authority or prominence as some of the apostles did. If the apostles had difficulty in this area, then elders can appreciate that they need to work hard to avoid any worldly tendency to enjoy having authority over others.

¹⁹ Granted, there are times when the elders need to be firm, such as when protecting the flock from “oppressive wolves.” (Acts 20:28-30) Paul told Titus to keep “exhorting and reproving with full authority.” (Titus 2:15) Yet, even when having to take such action, the elders try to dignify the ones who are involved. They appreciate that rather than harsh criticism, gentle persuasion is usually more effective in reaching hearts and in moving someone to follow a right course.

²⁰ Christ’s fine example motivates elders to love the flock. (John 13:12-15) Our hearts are warmed as we read how he taught his disciples in the preaching

19. What should elders remember when taking action to protect the flock?

20. How can elders imitate Jesus in setting a fine example?

By Way of Review

- Why was it appropriate for Peter to admonish fellow elders to shepherd the flock of God in their care?
- How should elders shepherd spiritually ailing ones?
- What moves elders to shepherd the flock of God in their care?

and disciple-making work. His pattern of humility touched the hearts of his disciples, motivating them to follow a course reflecting ‘lowliness of mind considering that the others were superior to them.’ (Phil. 2:3) Elders today are likewise moved to follow Jesus’ example, and they, in turn, want to be “examples to the flock.”

²¹ Peter concluded his admonition to the

21. To what reward can elders look forward?

older men by referring to a promise for the future. (**Read 1 Peter 5:4.**) The anointed overseers “will receive the unfadable crown of glory” with Christ in heaven. The under-shepherds of the “other sheep” will have the privilege of shepherding the flock of God on earth under the rulership of “the chief shepherd.” (John 10:16) The next article will discuss ways in which congregation members can support those appointed to take the lead.

“HAVE REGARD FOR THOSE WHO ARE WORKING HARD AMONG YOU”

“Have regard for those who are working hard among you and presiding over you in the Lord and admonishing you.”—1 THESS. 5:12.

IMAGINE yourself as a member of the first-century Thessalonian congregation, one of the earliest to be established in Europe. The apostle Paul had spent considerable time building up the brothers there. He may have appointed older men to take the lead, as was the case in other congregations. (Acts 14:23) But after the congregation was formed, the Jews organized a mob to rid the city of Paul and Silas. The Christians who remained might have felt deserted, perhaps even fearful.

1, 2. (a) What was the situation of the Thessalonian congregation when Paul wrote his first letter to them? (b) What did Paul encourage the Thessalonians to do?

² Understandably, after leaving Thessalonica, Paul was concerned about the fledgling congregation. He tried to return, but “Satan cut across” his path. So he sent Timothy to encourage the congregation. (1 Thess. 2:18; 3:2) When Timothy brought back a good report, Paul was moved to write the Thessalonians a letter. Among other things, Paul encouraged them to ‘have regard for those who were presiding over them.’—**Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13.**

³ The brothers who were taking the lead among the Thessalonian Christians were

3. What reasons did Thessalonian Christians have for giving extraordinary consideration to the older men?

not as experienced as Paul and his traveling companions; nor did they have the rich spiritual heritage of the elders in Jerusalem. After all, the congregation had existed for less than a year! Still, those in the congregation had reason to be grateful for their older men, who were “working hard” and “presiding over” the congregation and “admonishing” the brothers. Indeed, they had good reason to “give [the elders] more than extraordinary consideration in love.” This request was followed by Paul’s counsel to “be peaceable with one another.” If you had been there in Thessalonica, would you have shown deep appreciation for the elders’ work? How do you view the “gifts in men” whom God through Christ has provided in your congregation?—Eph. 4:8.

“Working Hard”

⁴ After sending Paul and Silas to Berea, how were the older men in Thessalonica “working hard”? Imitating Paul, they no doubt taught the congregation, using the Scriptures. ‘Did the Thessalonian Christians have appreciation for God’s Word?’ you may wonder. After all, the Bible says that the Bereans were “more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, . . . carefully examining the Scriptures daily.” (Acts 17:11) The comparison, however, was with the Thessalonian Jews in general, not with the Christians. Those who became believers ‘accepted God’s word, not as the word of men, but as the word of God.’ (1 Thess. 2:13) The older men must have worked hard to feed such ones spiritually.

⁵ Today, the faithful and discreet slave class is providing God’s flock with “food at the proper time.” (Matt. 24:45) Under the

4, 5. Why was it hard work for the older men in Paul’s day to teach the congregation, and why is it that way today?

slave’s direction, the local elders work hard to feed their brothers spiritually. Those in the congregation may have Bible-based literature in abundance, and in some languages such tools as the *Watch Tower Publications Index* and *Watchtower Library* on CD-ROM are available. To satisfy the congregation’s spiritual needs, the elders spend hours preparing meeting parts so that they can present the assigned information in a meaningful way. Have you thought about how much time the elders spend preparing their parts for meetings, assemblies, and conventions?

⁶ The older men in Thessalonica remembered the fine example that Paul set in shepherding the flock. It was not a matter of his making calls in a mechanical or perfunctory way. As discussed in the preceding article, Paul “became gentle . . . , as when a nursing mother cherishes her own children.” (***Read 1 Thessalonians 2:7, 8.***) He was even willing ‘to impart his own soul’! When shepherding, the older men were to be like him.

⁷ Christian shepherds today imitate Paul by cherishing the flock. By nature, some sheep may not be warm and companionable. Still, the elders try to show insight and “find good” in them. (Prov. 16:20) True, being imperfect, an elder may struggle to have a positive view of each one. Yet, as he tries his best to be gentle toward all, should he not be commended for his effort to be a good shepherd under Christ?

⁸ We all have reason to “be submissive” to the elders. As Paul wrote, ‘they are keeping watch over our souls.’ (Heb. 13:17) That expression reminds us of the literal shepherd who forgoes sleep in order to protect his

6, 7. (a) What example did the older men in Thessalonica have in Paul? (b) Why might it be challenging for elders today to imitate Paul?

8, 9. What are some ways that present-day elders ‘keep watch over our souls’?

flock. Likewise, the elders today may sacrifice some sleep while tending to the needs of those who have poor health or emotional or spiritual problems. For example, brothers on Hospital Liaison Committees have been awakened from sleep to respond to a medical crisis. Yet, when we face such a situation, how appreciative we are of their service!

⁹ Elders on Regional Building Committees and relief committees work hard to help the brothers. They deserve our wholehearted support! Consider the relief effort after Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar in 2008. To reach the Bothingone Congregation in the hard-hit Irrawaddy Delta region, the relief team traveled through devastated terrain strewn with corpses. When the local brothers saw that the first relief team to reach Bothingone included their former circuit overseer, they cried out: “Look! It’s our circuit overseer! Jehovah has saved us!” Do you appreciate the hard work that the elders render day and night? Some elders are appointed to serve on special committees to handle difficult judicial problems. These elders do not brag about what they have accomplished; yet those who benefit from their service are really grateful.—Matt. 6:2-4.

¹⁰ Many elders today also have paperwork to do. For example, the coordinator of the body of elders prepares the schedules for weekly meetings. The congregation secretary compiles the monthly and annual field service reports. The school overseer gives careful thought to the school schedule. Every three months, congregation account records are audited. The elders read letters from the branch office and apply the direction that helps maintain “the oneness in the faith.” (Eph. 4:3, 13) Through the efforts of such hardworking elders, “all things take

place decently and by arrangement.”—1 Cor. 14:40.

“Presiding Over You”

¹¹ Paul described the hardworking older men of Thessalonica as “presiding over” the congregation. The word in the original language implies “standing before” and can be rendered “directing; taking the lead among.” (1 Thess. 5:12; ftn.) Paul referred to the same elders as “working hard.” He was talking, not about one “presiding overseer,” but about all the older men in the congregation. Today, most elders stand before the congregation and conduct meetings. The recent adjustment to employ the designation “coordinator of the body of elders” helps us to view all the elders as members of a unified body.

¹² “Presiding over” the congregation involves more than just teaching. The same expression is used at 1 Timothy 3:4. Paul said that an overseer should be “a man presiding over his own household in a fine manner, having children in subjection with all seriousness.” Here the expression “presiding over” obviously includes not only teaching his children but also taking the lead in the family and “having children in subjection.” Yes, elders take the lead in the congregation, helping all to be in subjection to Jehovah.—1 Tim. 3:5.

¹³ In order to preside well over the flock, the elders discuss among themselves how to address the needs of the congregation. It might be more efficient if one elder made all the decisions. Yet, following the example of the first-century governing body, modern-day bodies of elders discuss matters freely,

11, 12. Who preside over the congregation, and what does doing so involve?

13. Why might it take time to reach a decision at an elders’ meeting?

10. What lesser-known work do elders do?

seeking guidance from the Scriptures. Their goal is to apply Scriptural principles to the needs of the local congregation. This is most effective when each elder prepares for the elders' meetings, considering the Scriptures and the guidelines from the faithful and discreet slave class. Of course, this takes time. When there is a difference of opinion, as occurred when the first-century governing body considered the matter of circumcision, extra time and research might be needed to reach a consensus based on the Scriptures.—Acts 15:2, 6, 7, 12-14, 28.

¹⁴ What might happen if one elder insists on having his way or tries to promote his own ideas? Or what if someone—like Diotrophes in the first century—sows seeds of dis-

14. Do you appreciate that the body of elders work together in unity? Why do you feel that way?

cord? (3 John 9, 10) The whole congregation will surely suffer. If Satan tried to upset the first-century congregation, we can be sure that he wants to disrupt the peace of the congregation today. He might appeal to selfish human tendencies, such as the desire for prominence. Thus, elders need to cultivate humility and work together as a unified body. How we appreciate the humility of the elders who do cooperate as a body!

“Admonishing You”

¹⁵ Paul then highlighted a difficult yet important task of the older men: admonishing the flock. In the Christian Greek Scriptures, only Paul used the Greek term translated “admonish.” It can refer to strong counsel

15. What motive do elders have when admonishing a brother or a sister?

*Do you appreciate
the many ways in which
the elders shepherd
the congregation?*



but does not indicate hostility. (Acts 20:31; 2 Thess. 3:15) For instance, Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “I am writing these things, not to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.” (1 Cor. 4:14) His motive behind the admonition was loving concern for others.

¹⁶ The elders bear in mind the importance of the manner in which they admonish others. They strive to imitate Paul by being kind, loving, and helpful. (**Read 1 Thessalonians 2:11, 12.**) Of course, the elders ‘hold firmly to the faithful word so that they may be able to exhort by teaching that is healthful.’—Titus 1:5-9.

¹⁷ Of course, elders are imperfect and may say things that they later regret. (1 Ki. 8:46; Jas. 3:8) Also, elders know that for spiritual brothers and sisters, receiving counsel is normally not ‘joyous but grievous.’ (Heb. 12:11) So when an elder approaches someone with words of admonition, he likely does so after giving the matter much consideration and praying over it. If you have been admonished, do you appreciate that elder’s loving concern?

¹⁸ Suppose you had a health problem that

16. Elders do well to keep what in mind when admonishing others?

17, 18. What should you keep in mind if you receive admonition from an elder?

Do You Recall?

- What reasons did the Thessalonian Christians have to appreciate those taking the lead among them?
- How do the elders in your congregation work hard for you?
- How do you benefit from the elders’ presiding over you?
- If given admonition by an elder, what should you keep in mind?

seemed medically inexplicable. Then a physician correctly identified the problem, but the diagnosis was rather hard to accept. Would you hold a grudge against that doctor? No! Even if he recommended an operation, you would likely agree to the treatment, believing it to be for your benefit. The way the doctor conveyed the information may have a bearing on your feelings, but would you let that determine your decision? Probably not. Likewise, do not allow the way you are admonished to prevent you from listening to those whom Jehovah and Jesus may be using to let you know how you can help or protect yourself spiritually.

Appreciate Jehovah’s Provision of the Elders

¹⁹ What would you do if you received a gift especially made for you? Would you show your appreciation by using it? The “gifts in men” are what Jehovah through Jesus Christ has provided for you. One way you can show your gratitude for these gifts is by listening intently to talks given by the elders and by trying to apply the points they bring out. You can also show your appreciation by making meaningful comments at meetings. Support the work in which the elders are taking the lead, such as the field ministry. If you have benefited from counsel you received from a certain elder, why not tell him so? In addition, why not show your appreciation for the elders’ families? Remember, for an elder to work hard in the congregation, his family is sacrificing time spent with him.

²⁰ Yes, we have ample reason to show gratitude for the elders, who are working hard among us, presiding over us, and admonishing us. These “gifts in men” are truly a loving provision from Jehovah!

19, 20. How may you show appreciation for the “gifts in men”?

“Make Your Way Successful” How?

“SUCCESS”—an eye-catching word! Some have climbed the corporate ladder and have achieved great success in getting rich and making a name for themselves. Others have dreamed of success but have met with utter failure.

To a large extent, success depends on what you make the focus of your life. Two other important factors are how you use your time and energy and whether you show initiative.

Many Christians have found that having a full share in the ministry has brought them great satisfaction. Having the full-time service as a career has helped young and old alike to be successful. Yet, some may feel that the ministry is somewhat boring and give it a secondary place in their lives as they pursue other goals. Why might this happen? What can you do to avoid losing sight of what is truly valuable? And how can you “make your way successful”?—Josh. 1:8.

Extracurricular Activities and Hobbies

Christian youths need to maintain the proper balance between serving the true God and participating in other activities. Those who do so are heading for success in life and deserve warm commendation.

Some young Christians, though, become heavily involved in extracurricular activities and hobbies. Such activities may not in themselves be objectionable. How-

ever, young Christians should ask themselves: ‘How much of my time might those activities demand? What about associations? What kind of spirit am I exposed to when engaging in those activities? And what might become the focus of my life?’ You likely realize that one could become so obsessed with

such activities that little time or energy would be left for maintaining a relationship with God. You can see, then, why setting priorities is important.—Eph. 5:15-17.

Consider the case of Wiktor.* He relates: “When I was 12, I joined a volleyball club. In time, I won many prizes and awards. I had an opportunity to become a star.” In time, Wiktor became disturbed about the effect that his pursuit of the sport was having on his spirituality. One day, he fell asleep while trying to read the Bible. Also, he recognized that he derived little joy from the field ministry. “The sport robbed me of my energy, and soon I realized that it was also robbing me of my spiritual zeal. I knew I was not doing all that I could.”

Higher Education?

A Christian has a Scriptural obligation to care for his family, and that includes providing for their material needs. (1 Tim. 5:8) Still, does this really require a college or a university degree?

It would be good to consider what effect pursuing higher education could have on one’s relationship with Jehovah. Let us illustrate this by considering a Scriptural example.

Baruch was the secretary to the prophet Jeremiah. At one point, rather than focusing on the privileges he had in serving Jehovah,

* Some names have been changed.



Jehovah warned Baruch about ambition

Baruch became ambitious. Jehovah noticed this and through Jeremiah warned him: “You keep seeking great things for yourself. Do not keep on seeking.”—Jer. 45:5.

What were the “great things” that Baruch kept seeking? He may have been tempted to make a name for himself in the Jewish system of things. Or the great things could have been material prosperity. In any case, he had lost sight of the more important things, those having spiritual value. (Phil. 1:10) Yet, Baruch obviously listened to Jehovah’s warning through Jeremiah and thus gained his soul as a spoil.—Jer. 43:6.

What can we draw from this account? The counsel Baruch received indicates that something was amiss. He was seeking great things for himself. If you have a means of supporting yourself, do you really need to spend time, money, and effort on further education just to realize personal aspirations or those of your parents or other relatives?

Consider Grzegorz, a computer programmer. Persuaded by his colleagues, he took up an intensive course of additional specialized training. Soon he had no time left for spiritual pursuits. He recalls: “I constantly felt on edge. My conscience troubled me because I could not reach the spiritual goals I had set for myself.”

Engrossed in One’s Employment

God’s Word encourages true Christians to be hardworking and to be responsible employees and employers. The apostle Paul wrote: “Whatever you are doing, work at it whole-souled as to Jehovah, and not to men.” (Col. 3:22, 23) However, while hard work is commendable, something more is needed—a good relationship with our Creator. (Eccl. 12:13) If a Christian became engrossed in his secular work, spiritual pursuits could easily be pushed into second place.

Becoming absorbed in a secular job can rob a Christian of the energy needed to maintain his own spiritual balance and to assist his family. King Solomon observed that “a double handful of hard work” is often accompanied by “striving after the wind.” If a Christian is overly involved in a secular career, he can end up having prolonged, severe stress. Such a person can even become enslaved to a career to the extent of experiencing burnout. If so, can he really “rejoice . . . and see good for all his hard work”? (Eccl. 3:12, 13; 4:6) More important, would he have enough physical and emotional strength left to carry out his duties

in the family and to engage in spiritual activities?

Janusz, who lives in Eastern Europe, became engrossed in his gardening business. He recalls: "Worldly people admired me because I was full of initiative and was able to complete each assigned task. But my spirituality suffered, and I stopped sharing in the field ministry. Soon I stopped attending

meetings. I became so proud that I dismissed the counsel from the elders and drew away from the congregation."

You Can Make Your Life a Success

We have considered three areas in which a Christian might become very involved at the cost of his spirituality. Are you involved in any of these? If so, the following

How Can You Make Your Way Successful?

With so many things vying for your attention, how can you avoid losing sight of what is truly valuable? Take some time to examine your motives and priorities by reflecting on the following questions:

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND HOBBIES

- What kinds of attitudes are you exposed to when you engage in those activities?
- How much time do these demand?
- Could these become the focus of your life?
- Are these consuming time you previously devoted to spiritual pursuits?
- What about associations?
- Do you find these associates more appealing than fellow believers?

HIGHER EDUCATION

- If you have a means of supporting yourself, do you really need to spend time, money, and effort on further education?
- To support yourself, is it

really necessary to have a college or a university degree?

- What would be the effect on your meeting attendance?
- Have you 'made sure of the more important things'?
- Do you need to strengthen your confidence in Jehovah's ability to provide for you?

EMPLOYMENT

- Does your choice allow you to 'rejoice and see good for all your hard work'?
- Do you have enough physical and emotional strength left to carry out your duties in the family and to engage in spiritual activities?



- Do you take enough time to communicate with your family?
- Have you become so absorbed in work that spiritual matters are being pushed aside?
- Has it affected the quality of your talk assignments?

questions, scriptures, and comments may help you to determine whether you are really on the way to success.

Extracurricular activities and hobbies: How absorbed are you in such activities? Are these consuming time that you previously devoted to spiritual pursuits? Do you find association with your fellow believers to be less appealing? If so, why not imitate King David, who implored Jehovah: “Make known to me the way in which I should walk.”—Ps. 143:8.

A traveling overseer helped Wiktor, mentioned earlier. The overseer commented to him: “You speak passionately about your career in volleyball.” “That shook me up,” says Wiktor. “I realized that I had gone too far. Soon, I broke off association with worldly friends at the club and sought out friends in the congregation.” Today, Wiktor is serving Jehovah zealously in his congregation. He recommends: “Ask your friends, your parents, or the congregation elders if they have observed whether your school activities draw you closer to Jehovah or away from him.”

Why not indicate to the elders in your congregation that you would like to reach out for more privileges in serving God? Could you support the elderly who are in need of company or assistance, perhaps helping with their shopping or tasks in their home? Regardless of your age, you might be able to engage in the full-time ministry, sharing with others the basis for your joy.

Higher education: Jesus warned against ‘seeking your own glory.’ (John 7:18) Whatever you decide as to how much secular education you will obtain, have you ‘made sure of the more important things’?—Phil. 1: 9, 10.

Grzegorz, the computer programmer, made some changes in his life. He said: “Taking seriously the advice of the elders, I simplified my life. I realized that I did not need to further my secular education. That would only rob me of time and energy.” Grzegorz got more involved in congregation activities. In time, he graduated from what is now called the Bible School for Single Brothers. Yes, he ‘bought out the time’ to further his divine education.—Eph. 5:16.

Secular employment: Have you become so absorbed in your work that spiritual interests are being pushed aside? Do you take enough time to communicate with your family? And in the congregation, are you improving the quality of your talk assignments? How about engaging in upbuilding conversation with others? “Fear the true God and keep his commandments,” and you will receive Jehovah’s rich blessing and ‘see good because of your hard work.’—Eccl. 2:24; 12:13.

Janusz, mentioned earlier, did not achieve great success in his gardening business; rather, he met with failure. With no income and deeply in debt, he turned to Jehovah. Janusz put his affairs in order and now serves as a regular pioneer and a congregation elder. He says: “When I am satisfied with the basics and at the same time give of myself spiritually, I have peace of mind and a calm heart.”—Phil. 4:6, 7.

Take some time to make an honest appraisal of your motives and priorities. Serving Jehovah is a course to lifelong success. Make it the center of your life.

You may have to make some adjustments, even eliminating unnecessary things in order to prove to yourself “the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Rom. 12:2) But you can “make your way successful” by serving him whole-souled.