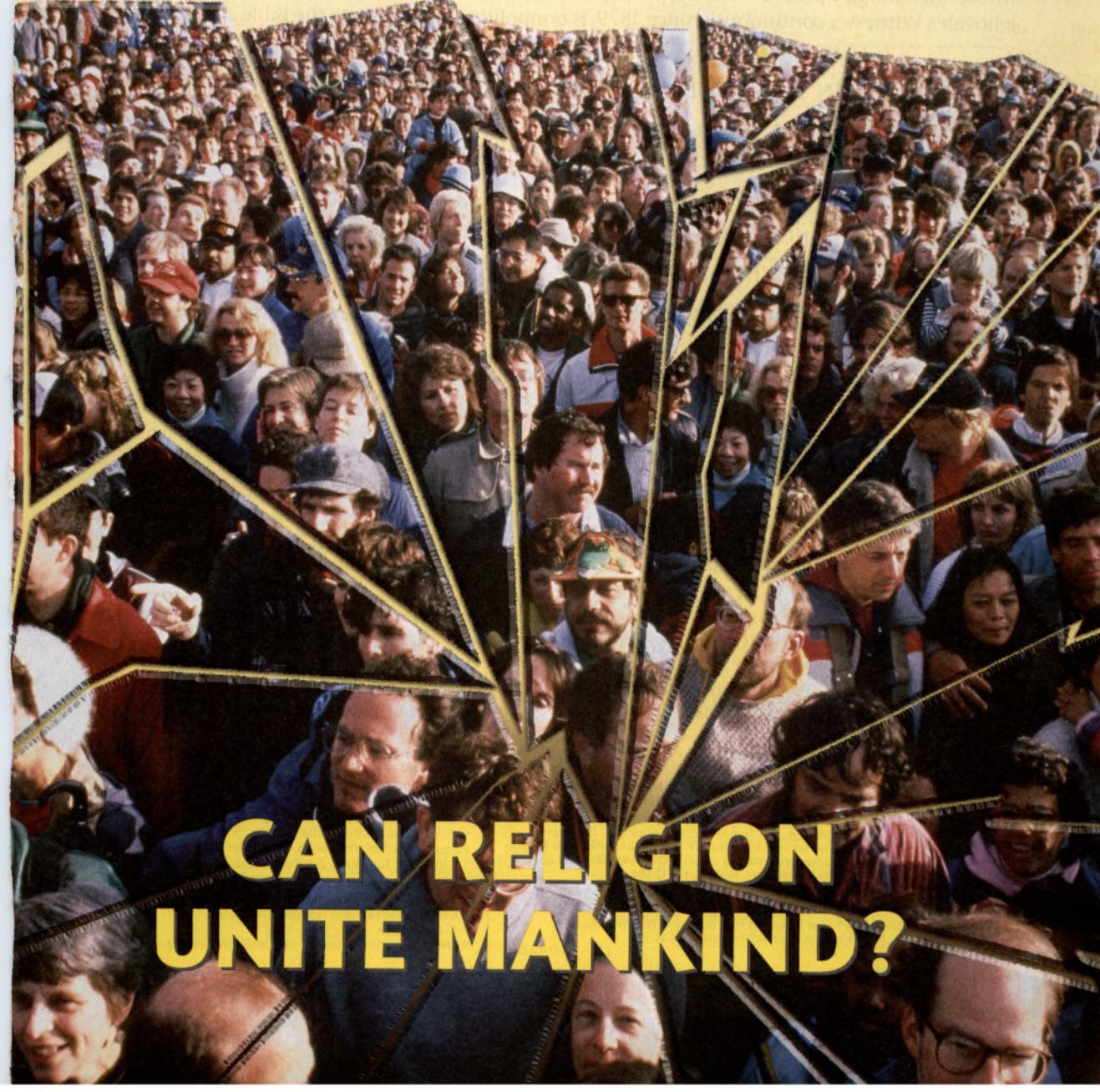


THE WATCHTOWER

JANUARY 1, 2005

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



CAN RELIGION
UNITE MANKIND?

THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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THE PURPOSE OF *THE WATCHTOWER* is to exalt Jehovah God as Sovereign Lord of the universe. It keeps watch on world events as these fulfill Bible prophecy. It comforts all peoples with the good news that God's Kingdom will soon destroy those who oppress their fellowmen and that it will turn the earth into a paradise. It encourages faith in God's now-reigning King, Jesus Christ, whose shed blood opens the way for mankind to gain eternal life. *The Watchtower*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879, is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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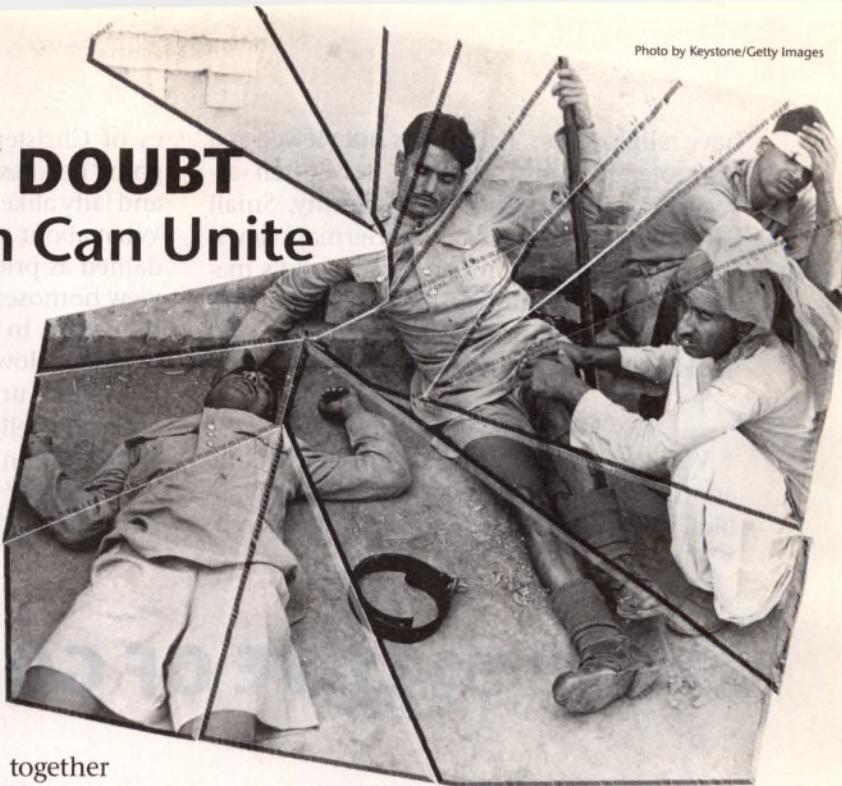
WHY MANY DOUBT That Religion Can Unite Mankind

LOVE your neighbor." (Matthew 22:39) This basic rule of conduct is acclaimed by many religions. If such religions were effective in teaching their members to love their neighbor, their flocks would be drawn together and be united. However, is that what you have observed? Are religions a force for unity? A recent survey in Germany asked the question: "Do religions unite people, or are they more likely to separate them?" Of the respondents, 22 percent felt that religions unite, whereas 52 percent felt that they divide, or separate. Perhaps people in your country feel much the same way.

Why do many have little confidence that religion can unite mankind? Perhaps because of what they know from history. Instead of drawing people together, religion has often pushed them apart. In some instances, religion has been the cover under which the most dreadful atrocities have been committed. Consider some examples from just the last 100 years.

Influenced by Religion

During the second world war, Roman Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs in the Balkans were at one another's throats. Both groups claimed to follow Jesus, who taught



Policemen wounded during clash between religious groups in India in 1947

his followers to love their neighbor. Yet, their conflict led to "one of the most appalling civilian massacres known to history," as one researcher put it. The world was aghast at the death toll of more than 500,000 men, women, and children.

In 1947 the Indian subcontinent was home to some 400 million people—about a fifth of humanity—mainly Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. When India was partitioned, the Islamic nation of Pakistan was born. At the time, hundreds of thousands of refugees from both countries were burned, beaten, tortured, and shot in a series of religious massacres.

As if the foregoing examples were not disturbing enough, the turn of the century brought to the fore the threat of terrorism. Today, terrorism has put the whole world on alert, and many terrorist groups claim to

have religious ties. Religion is not viewed as a promoter of unity. Instead, it is often associated with violence and disunity. Small wonder, therefore, that the German news-magazine *FOCUS* compared the world's major religions—Buddhism, Christendom, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Taoism—to gunpowder.

Internal Squabbles

While some religions are at war with one another, others are beset by internal squabbles. For instance, in recent years the church-

es of Christendom have been split by ongoing debates on matters of doctrine. Clergy and laity alike ask: Is birth control permitted? What about abortion? Should women be ordained as priests? How ought the church to view homosexuality? Should a religion sanction war? In view of such disunity, many wonder, 'How can a religion unite mankind if it cannot unite even its own members?'

Clearly, religion in general has failed to be a force for unity. But are all religions marked by divisions? Is there a religion that is different—one that can unite mankind?

United by LOVE OF GOD

WHEN the Christian congregation was formed in the first century of our Common Era, one of its outstanding characteristics—despite the diversity of its members—was its unity. Those worshipers of the true God came from nations in Asia, Europe, and Africa. They represented a variety of backgrounds—priests, soldiers, slaves, refugees, tradesmen, professionals, and businesspeople. Some were Jews, and others, Gentiles. Many had been adulterers, homosexuals, drunkards, thieves, or extortioners. Nevertheless, when they became Christians, they left their bad practices behind and became closely united in the faith.

What enabled first-century Christianity to bring all these people together in unity? Why were they at peace with one another and with people in general? Why did they not join in uprisings and conflicts? Why was early Christianity so different from today's major religions?

Despite coming from diverse backgrounds, the early Christians were united

What Drew Congregation Members Close Together?

The foremost factor that united fellow believers in the first century was love of God. Those Christians recognized their primary obligation to love the true God, Jehovah, with all their heart, soul, and mind. For instance, the apostle Peter, a Jew, was instructed to visit the house of a foreign national,



someone with whom he would not normally have close association. What moved him to obey was primarily love for Jehovah. Peter and other early Christians enjoyed a close relationship with God that was based on accurate knowledge of His personality, likes, and dislikes. In time, all worshipers understood that it was Jehovah's will for them to be "united in the same mind and in the same line of thought."—1 Corinthians 1:10; Matthew 22:37; Acts 10:1-35.

Believers were further drawn together by their faith in Jesus Christ. They wanted to follow closely in his footsteps. He commanded them: "Love one another; just as I have loved you . . . By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among yourselves." (John 13:34, 35) This was to be, not a superficial emotion, but a self-sacrificing love. What would be the result? Jesus prayed concerning those putting faith in him: "I make request . . . that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in union with me and I am in union with you, that they also may be in union with us."—John 17:20, 21; 1 Peter 2:21.

Jehovah poured out his holy spirit, or active force, upon his true servants. This spirit promoted unity among them. It opened to

them an understanding of Bible teachings that was accepted in all congregations. Worshipers of Jehovah preached the same message—the sanctification of Jehovah's name through God's Messianic Kingdom, a heavenly government that is to rule over all mankind. Early Christians understood their obligation to be "no part of this world." Hence, whenever civil uprisings or military conflicts occurred, Christians remained neutral. They pursued peace with everyone.—John 14:26; 18:36; Matthew 6:9, 10; Acts 2:1-4; Romans 12:17-21.

All believers assumed their responsibility to promote unity. How? By ensuring that their conduct was in harmony with the Bible. Hence, the apostle Paul wrote to Christians: "Put away the old personality which conforms to your former course of conduct," and "put on the new personality."—Ephesians 4:22-32.

Unity Maintained

Of course, believers in the first century were imperfect, and situations developed that challenged their unity. For example, Acts 6:1-6 relates that a difference arose between Jewish Christians who spoke Greek and those who spoke Hebrew. Those speaking Greek felt that they were being discriminated against. Once the apostles were informed about the matter, however, it was attended to swiftly and fairly. Later, a question of doctrine led to controversy regarding the obligations of non-Jews in the Christian congregation. A decision was made based on Bible principles, and this decision was uniformly accepted.—Acts 15:1-29.

These examples show that disagreements did not lead to ethnic divisions or to unyielding doctrinal disunity in the first-century Christian congregation. Why not? Because the unifying factors—love for Jehovah, faith in Jesus Christ, self-sacrificing love for one



another, acceptance of the guidance of the holy spirit, a common understanding of Bible teachings, and a readiness to change one's conduct—were powerful enough to keep the early congregation united and at peace.

United in Worship in Modern Times

Can unity be achieved in the same way today? Can these same factors still draw members of a faith together and enable them to be at peace with all races in all parts of the world? Yes, they can! Jehovah's Witnesses are united in a worldwide brotherhood spanning more than 230 lands, islands, and territories. And they are united by the same factors that united Christians in the first century.

Foremost in contributing to the unity enjoyed by Jehovah's Witnesses is their devotion to Jehovah God. This means that they strive to be loyal to him under all circumstances. Witnesses of Jehovah also exercise faith in Jesus Christ and in his teachings. These Christians show self-sacrificing love for fellow believers and preach the same good news of God's Kingdom in all the lands where they are active. They are happy to talk about this Kingdom with people of all faiths, races, nationalities, and social groups. Jehovah's Witnesses also remain neutral in the affairs of the world, which helps them to withstand the political, cultural, social, and commercial pressures that are so divisive among mankind. All Witnesses accept their obligation to promote unity by conducting themselves in harmony with Bible standards.

Unity Attracts Others

This unity has often aroused the interest of individuals who were not Witnesses. Ilse,* for instance, was once a Catholic nun in a convent in Germany. What attracted her to

Jehovah's Witnesses? Ilse said: "They are the best people I have ever met. They do not go to war; they do nothing to harm anyone.. They want to help people to live happily on a paradise earth under God's Kingdom."

Then there is Günther, who was a German soldier stationed in France during the second world war. One day a Protestant priest held a religious service for the soldiers in Günther's unit. The priest prayed for blessings, protection, and victory. After the service, Günther took up his position as a lookout. Through his binoculars, he observed enemy troops on the other side of the battle lines also attending a religious service conducted by a priest. Günther later noted: "Likely that priest also prayed for blessings, protection, and victory. I wondered how it was possible for Christian churches to be on opposing sides of the same war." These impressions were etched on Günther's memory. When he later came in contact with Jehovah's Witnesses, who do not participate in war, Günther became part of their worldwide brotherhood.

Ashok and Feema used to belong to an Eastern religion. In their home, they had a shrine to a god. When serious illness struck their family, they reexamined their religion. In conversations with Jehovah's Witnesses, Ashok and Feema were impressed by the teachings of the Bible and by the love existing among the Witnesses. They are now zealous publishers of the good news of Jehovah's Kingdom.

Ilse, Günther, Ashok, and Feema are united with millions of Jehovah's Witnesses in a global brotherhood. They believe the Bible's promise that the same factors that unite them in worship today will soon unite all obedient mankind. Then, there will be no further atrocities, disunity, and division in the name of religion. The whole world will be united in the worship of the true God, Jehovah.—Revelation 21:4, 5.

* Some of the names used in this article have been changed.

HOLD TO THE PATTERN JESUS SET

"I set the pattern for you, that, just as I did to you, you should do also."—JOHN 13:15.

IN ALL the history of mankind, only one person has lived his whole life without sinning. That is Jesus. Apart from Jesus, "there is no man that does not sin." (1 Kings 8:46; Romans 3:23) For that reason, genuine Christians view Jesus as a perfect model to be imitated. Indeed, on Nisan 14, 33 C.E., shortly before his death, Jesus himself told his followers to imitate him. He said: "I set the pattern for you, that, just as I did to you, you should do also." (John 13:15) During that last night, Jesus mentioned a number of ways in which Christians should strive to be like him. In this article, we will consider some of them.

The Need for Humility

² When Jesus urged his disciples to follow the pattern he set, he was specifically speaking of humility. On more than one occasion, he had counseled his followers to be humble, and on the night of Nisan 14, he demonstrated his own humility by washing the feet of his apostles. Then Jesus said: "If I, although Lord and Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash the feet of one another." (John 13:14) Thereafter, he told his apostles to follow the pattern he set. And what a fine pattern of humility that was!

1. Why is Jesus a model for Christians to imitate?
- 2, 3. In what ways was Jesus a perfect pattern of humility?



Jesus set the perfect pattern of humility

³ The apostle Paul tells us that before coming to earth, Jesus was "existing in God's form." Nevertheless, he emptied himself and became a lowly human. More than that, "he humbled himself and became obedient as far as death, yes, death on a torture stake." (Philippians 2:6-8) Think of it. Jesus, the second-highest person in the universe, consented to become lower than the angels, to be born a helpless baby, to grow up subject to imperfect parents, and finally to die like a despised criminal. (Colossians 1:15, 16; Hebrews 2:6, 7) What humility! Is it possible to imitate that "mental attitude" and cultivate such "lowliness of mind"? (Philippians 2:3-5) Yes, but it is not easy.

⁴ The opposite of humility is pride. (Proverbs 6:16-19) Pride led to Satan's downfall. (1 Timothy 3:6) It easily takes root in human hearts, and once there, it is hard to remove. People are prideful because of their country, their race, their possessions, their education, their secular achievements, their social standing, their looks, their sporting abilities, and many other things. Yet, none of those things are important to Jehovah. (1 Corinthians 4:7) And if they cause us to be proud, they damage our relationship with him. "Jehovah is high, and yet the humble one he sees; but the lofty one he knows only from a distance."—Psalm 138:6; Proverbs 8:13.

Humble Among Our Brothers

⁵ Even our contributions to and achievements in Jehovah's service should not make us proud; neither should responsibilities in the congregation. (1 Chronicles 29:14; 1 Timothy 6:17, 18) In fact, the weightier our responsibilities, the more humble we need to be. The apostle Peter urged elders not to be "lording it over those who are God's inheritance, but [to become] examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:3) Elders are appointed to be servants and examples, not lords and masters.—Luke 22:24-26; 2 Corinthians 1:24.

⁶ Elders are not alone in needing humility. To younger men, who may be proud of their quicker minds and stronger bodies compared with those of older ones, Peter wrote: "Gird yourselves with lowliness of mind toward one another, because God opposes the haughty ones, but he gives undeserved kindness to the humble ones." (1 Peter 5:5) Yes, Christlike humility is vital for all. It takes hu-

4. What things make humans proud, but why is pride dangerous?
5. Why is it vital that elders be humble?
6. In what areas of Christian living do we need humility?

mility to preach the good news, especially in the face of indifference or hostility. It takes humility to accept counsel or to simplify our life in order to enlarge our share in the ministry. In addition, we need humility as well as courageous faith when enduring bad publicity, legal attacks, or violent persecution.—1 Peter 5:6.

⁷ How can a person overcome pride and conduct himself "with lowliness of mind considering that the others are superior" to him? (Philippians 2:3) He needs to view himself as Jehovah does. Jesus explained the right attitude when he said: "You, also, when you have done all the things assigned to you, say, 'We are good-for-nothing slaves. What we have done is what we ought to have done.'" (Luke 17:10) Remember, nothing we can do compares with what Jesus did. Yet, Jesus was humble.

⁸ Further, we can ask for Jehovah's help to

- 7, 8. What are some ways in which we can cultivate humility?



Every aspect of a Christian's life, including preaching, calls for humility



Satan can make improper entertainment seem acceptable to a Christian

cultivate the proper view of ourselves. Like the psalmist, we can pray: "Teach me goodness, sensibleness and knowledge themselves, for in your commandments I have exercised faith." (Psalm 119:66) Jehovah will help us to develop a sensible, balanced view of ourselves, and he will bless us for our humble attitude. (Proverbs 18:12) Jesus said: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."—Matthew 23:12.

A Proper View of Right and Wrong

⁹ Despite living for 33 years among imperfect people, Jesus remained "without sin." (Hebrews 4:15) In fact, when prophesying about the Messiah, the psalmist said: "You have loved righteousness and you hate wickedness." (Psalm 45:7; Hebrews 1:9) In this too Christians strive to imitate Jesus. Not only do they know right from wrong; they hate what is wrong and love what is right. (Amos 5:15) This helps them to battle against their inborn sinful inclinations.—Genesis 8:21; Romans 7:21-25.

¹⁰ Jesus said to the Pharisee Nicodemus: "He that practices vile things hates the light

9. How did Jesus view right and wrong?
10. If we unrepentantly practice "vile things," what attitude are we betraying?

and does not come to the light, in order that his works may not be reproved. But he that does what is true comes to the light, in order that his works may be made manifest as having been worked in harmony with God." (John 3:20, 21) Consider: John identified Jesus as "the true light that gives light to every sort of man." (John 1:9, 10) Yet, Jesus said that if we practice "vile things"—things that are wrong, unacceptable to God—we hate the light. Can you imagine hating Jesus and what he stands for? Yet, that is the position of those who unrepentantly practice sin. Perhaps they do not view things that way, but clearly, Jesus does.

How to Cultivate Jesus' View of Right and Wrong

¹¹ We need a clear understanding of what is right and what is wrong from Jehovah's viewpoint. We gain that understanding only from a study of God's Word, the Bible. As we pursue such a study, we need to pray as the psalmist prayed: "Make me know your own ways, O Jehovah; teach me your own paths." (Psalm 25:4) Remember, however, that Satan is deceptive. (2 Corinthians 11:14) He can disguise wrong and make it appear acceptable to an unwary Christian. Hence, we need to meditate deeply on what we learn and closely heed the counsel of "the faithful and discreet slave." (Matthew 24:45-47) Study, prayer, and meditation on what we learn will help us to grow to maturity and be among those who "through use have their perceptive powers trained to distinguish both right and wrong." (Hebrews 5:14) Then we will be disposed to hate the wrong and love the right.

¹² If we hate what is wrong, we will not

11. What is vital if we are to cultivate Jesus' view of right and wrong?
12. What Bible counsel helps us not to practice lawlessness?

allow a desire for wrong things to grow in our hearts. Many years after Jesus' death, the apostle John wrote: "Do not be loving either the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him; because everything in the world—the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the showy display of one's means of life—does not originate with the Father, but originates with the world."—1 John 2:15, 16.

¹³ Some might reason that not everything in the world is wrong. Even so, the world and its attractions can easily distract us from serving Jehovah. And nothing the world provides is designed to draw us closer to God. Hence, if we grow to *love* the things in the world, even things that may not in themselves be wrong, we are on a dangerous course. (1 Timothy 6:9, 10) Besides, much in the world truly is bad and can corrupt us. If we watch movies or television programs that highlight violence, materialism, or sexual immorality, those things can become acceptable—and then tempting. If we mix with people whose main interest is in improving their life-style or cultivating business opportunities, those things can become of chief importance to us too.—Matthew 6:24; 1 Corinthians 15:33.

¹⁴ On the other hand, if we find delight in Jehovah's Word, "the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the showy display of one's means of life" will lose much of their allure. Further, if we associate with those who put the interests of God's Kingdom first, we will become like them, lov-

13, 14. (a) Why is a love of the things of the world dangerous for Christians? (b) How can we avoid cultivating a love of things in the world?



The love of our brothers will fortify us against opposition

ing what they love and avoiding what they avoid.—Psalm 15:4; Proverbs 13:20.

¹⁵ Hating lawlessness and loving righteousness helped Jesus to keep his eyes on "the joy that was set before him." (Hebrews 12:2) The same can be true of us. We know that "the world is passing away and so is its desire." Any gratification that this world affords is only temporary. However, "he that does the will of God remains forever." (1 John 2:17) Because Jesus did God's will, he opened the way for humans to gain everlasting life. (1 John 5:13) May we all imitate him and benefit from his integrity.

Facing Persecution

¹⁶ Jesus indicated another way that his disciples would imitate him, saying: "This is my commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you." (John 15:12, 13, 17) There are many reasons why Christians love their brothers. On this occasion, Jesus above all had in mind the hatred they would face from the world. He said: "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you. . . . A slave is not greater than his

15. As was the case with Jesus, how will loving righteousness and hating lawlessness strengthen us?

16. Why did Jesus urge his followers to love one another?

master. If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you also." (John 15:18, 20) Yes, even in being persecuted, Christians are like Jesus. They need to develop a strong, loving bond to help them withstand that hatred.

¹⁷ Why would the world hate Christians? Because, like Jesus, they are "no part of the world." (John 17:14, 16) They are neutral in military and political matters, and they observe Bible principles, respecting the sanctity of life and keeping to a high moral code. (Acts 15:28, 29; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11) Their primary goals are spiritual, not material. They live in the world, but as Paul wrote, they do not 'use it to the full.' (1 Corinthians 7:31) True, some have expressed admiration for the high standards of Jehovah's Witnesses. But Jehovah's Witnesses do not make compromises to seek admiration or acceptance. As a result, most in the world do not understand them, and many hate them.

¹⁸ Jesus' apostles saw the world's intense hatred when Jesus was arrested and executed, and they saw how Jesus handled that hatred. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus' religious opponents came to arrest him. Peter tried to protect him with a sword, but Jesus said to Peter: "Return your sword to its place, for all those who take the sword will perish by the

17. Why does the world hate true Christians?

18, 19. Following the pattern of Jesus, how do Christians handle opposition and persecution?

Can You Explain?

- Why is it vital that a Christian be humble?
- How can we cultivate a proper view of right and wrong?
- In what way do Christians imitate Jesus in handling opposition and persecution?
- How is it possible to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ"?

sword." (Matthew 26:52; Luke 22:50, 51) In earlier times, Israelites fought with the sword against their enemies. Now, though, things were different. God's Kingdom was "no part of this world" and had no national boundaries to protect. (John 18:36) Soon Peter would be part of a spiritual nation, whose members would have their citizenship in heaven. (Galatians 6:16; Philippians 3:20, 21) Henceforth, then, Jesus' followers would handle hatred and persecution the way Jesus did—fearlessly but peaceably. They would confidently leave the outcome of matters in Jehovah's hands and rely on him for the strength to endure.—Luke 22:42.

¹⁹ Years later, Peter wrote: "Christ suffered for you, leaving you a model for you to follow his steps closely. . . . When he was being reviled, he did not go reviling in return. When he was suffering, he did not go threatening, but kept on committing himself to the one who judges righteously." (1 Peter 2:21-23) Just as Jesus warned, Christians have experienced harsh persecution over the years. Both in the first century and in our own time, they have followed Jesus' example and built up a wonderful record of faithful endurance, demonstrating that they are peaceful integrity keepers. (Revelation 2:9, 10) May we all individually do likewise when circumstances demand it.—2 Timothy 3:12.

"Put On the Lord Jesus Christ"

²⁰ Paul wrote to the congregation in Rome: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not be planning ahead for the desires of the flesh." (Romans 13:14) Christians wear Jesus, as it were, like a garment. They strive to imitate his qualities and actions to such an extent that they become a reflection—even if imperfect—of their Master.—1 Thessalonians 1:6.

²¹ We can successfully "put on the Lord

20-22. In what way do Christians "put on the Lord Jesus Christ"?

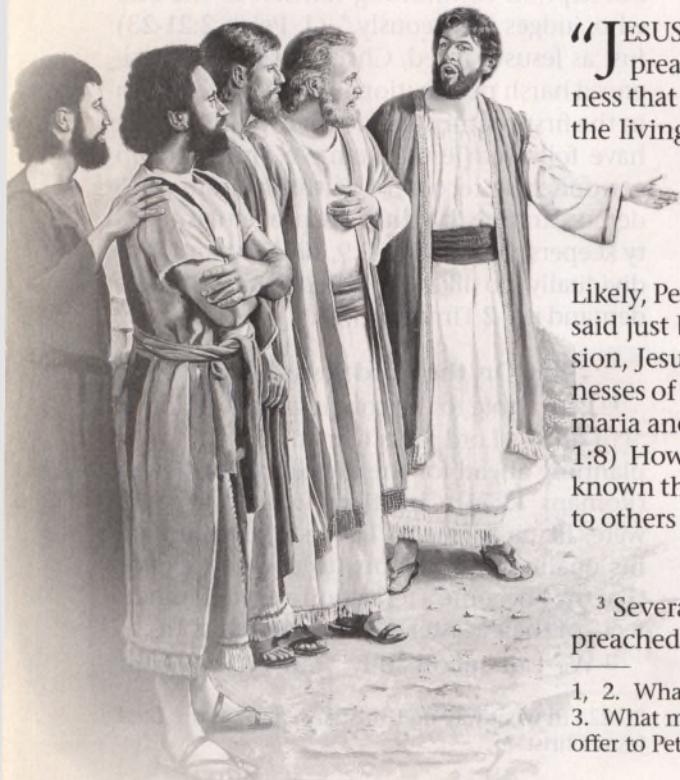
Jesus Christ" if we become familiar with the Master's life and strive to live as he lived. We imitate his humility, his love of righteousness, his hatred of lawlessness, his love for his brothers, his being no part of the world, and his patient endurance of suffering. We do not 'plan ahead for the desires of the flesh'—that is, we do not make our chief purpose in life the reaching of secular goals or the satis-

fying of fleshly desires. Rather, when making a decision or handling a problem, we ask: 'What would Jesus do in this situation? What would he want me to do?'

²² Finally, we imitate Jesus in keeping busy "preaching the good news." (Matthew 4:23; 1 Corinthians 15:58) In that way too, Christians follow the pattern that Jesus set, and the following article will discuss how.

TRAINED TO GIVE A THOROUGH WITNESS

"You will be witnesses of me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the most distant part of the earth."—ACTS 1:8.



"**J**ESUS who was from Nazareth . . . ordered us to preach to the people and to give a thorough witness that this is the One decreed by God to be judge of the living and the dead." (Acts 10:38, 42) With those words, the apostle Peter explained to Cornelius and his family the commission he had received to be an evangelizer.

² When did Jesus give that commission? Likely, Peter was thinking of what the resurrected Jesus said just before he ascended to heaven. On that occasion, Jesus told his faithful disciples: "You will be witnesses of me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the most distant part of the earth." (Acts 1:8) However, for some time before that, Peter had known that as a disciple of Jesus, he would have to talk to others about his faith in Jesus.

Three Years of Training

³ Several months after his baptism in 29 C.E., Jesus preached where Peter and his brother Andrew worked

- 1, 2. What was Peter's commission, and who gave it to him?
3. What miracle did Jesus perform, and what invitation did he offer to Peter and Andrew?

as fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. They had been working all night but without success. Still, Jesus told them: "Pull out to where it is deep, and you men let down your nets for a catch." When they did what Jesus said, "they enclosed a great multitude of fish. In fact, their nets began ripping apart." On seeing the miracle, Peter was struck with fear, but Jesus calmed him, saying: "Stop being afraid. From now on you will be catching men alive."—Luke 5:4-10.

⁴ Immediately, Peter and Andrew—as well as James and John, the sons of Zebedee—left their boats and followed Jesus. For almost three years, they accompanied Jesus on his preaching tours and received training as evangelizers. (Matthew 10:7; Mark 1:16, 18, 20, 38; Luke 4:43; 10:9) At the end of that time, on Nisan 14, 33 C.E., Jesus told them: "He that exercises faith in me, that one also will do the works that I do; and he will do works greater than these." (John 14:12) Jesus' disciples would give a thorough witness as Jesus did but on a much larger scale. As they soon learned, they and all future disciples would bear witness in "all the nations," right up until "the conclusion of the system of things."—Matthew 28:19, 20.

⁵ We are living in "the conclusion of the system of things." (Matthew 24:3) Unlike those first disciples, we cannot accompany Jesus and observe him preaching to people. Still, we can benefit from his training by reading in the Bible how he preached and what instructions he gave his followers. (Luke 10:1-11) However, this article will discuss something else of vital importance that Jesus demonstrated to his disciples—the right attitude toward the preaching work.

4. (a) How did Jesus prepare his disciples to give a witness? (b) How would the ministry of Jesus' disciples compare with his own?

5. In what ways can we benefit from the training Jesus gave his followers?

A Concern for People

⁶ Why did Jesus give such an effective witness? One reason was his deep interest in and concern for people. The psalmist foretold that Jesus would "feel sorry for the lowly one and the poor one." (Psalm 72:13) He certainly fulfilled that prophecy. The Bible says about one occasion: "On seeing the crowds he felt pity for them, because they were skinned and thrown about like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:36) Even gross sinners sensed his concern and were drawn to him.—Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 7:36-38; 19:1-10.

⁷ We today will be effective if we show the same concern for people. Before sharing in the ministry, why not take a moment to reflect on how much people need the information you are taking to them? Think of the problems they may have that only the Kingdom will solve. Be resolved to be positive with everyone, since you do not know who will respond to the message. Perhaps the next person you approach has been praying for someone like you to come and help him!

Motivated by Love

⁸ The good news that Jesus declared had to do with the accomplishment of Jehovah's will, the sanctification of His name, and the vindication of His sovereignty—the most important issues before mankind. (Matthew 6:9, 10) Because he loved his Father, Jesus was moved to keep his integrity to the end and to give a thorough witness about the Kingdom, which will resolve those issues. (John 14:31) Because Jesus' followers today have the same motivation, they are diligent as they share in the ministry. The apostle John said: "This is what the

6, 7. What quality of Jesus made his ministry effective, and how can we imitate him in this respect?

8. In imitation of Jesus, what motivates his followers to preach the good news?

love of God means, that we observe his commandments," including the commandment to preach the good news and make disciples.—1 John 5:3; Matthew 28:19, 20.

⁹ Jesus told his followers: "If you love me, you will observe my commandments. He that has my commandments and observes them, that one is he who loves me." (John 14:15, 21) Thus, love of Jesus should motivate us to witness about the truth and observe the other things that Jesus commanded. During one of his postresurrection appearances, Jesus urged Peter: "Feed my lambs. . . . Shepherd my little sheep. . . . Feed my little sheep."

What should move Peter to do that? Jesus indicated the answer when he repeatedly asked Peter: "Do you love me? . . . Do you love me? . . . Do you have affection for me?" Yes, Peter's love for Jesus, his affection for him, would motivate him to give a thorough witness, find Jesus' "little sheep," and thereafter be a spiritual shepherd to them.—John 21:15-17.

¹⁰ Today, we are not personally acquainted with Jesus as Peter was. Still, we have a deep understanding of what Jesus did for us. Our hearts are moved by the great love that led him to "taste death for every man." (Hebrews 2:9; John 15:13) We feel as Paul felt when he wrote: "The love the Christ has compels us. . . . He died for all that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him." (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15) We demonstrate that we take Jesus' love for us seriously and that we love him in return by taking seriously the commission to give a *thorough* witness. (1 John 2:3-5) We would never want to adopt a casual approach to the

9, 10. Apart from love of God, what other love motivates us to give a thorough witness?

preaching work, as if we esteemed Jesus' sacrifice as of ordinary value.—Hebrews 10:29.

Keeping the Right Focus

¹¹ When Jesus was before Pontius Pilate, he said: "For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth." (John 18:37) Jesus allowed nothing to distract him from bearing witness to the truth. That was God's will for him.

¹² Satan certainly tested Jesus in this regard. Shortly after Jesus' baptism, Satan offered to make him a great man in the world,

to give him "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory." (Matthew 4:8, 9) Later, the Jews wanted to make him a king. (John 6:15) Some might ponder the possible benefits of Jesus' accepting those offers, perhaps reasoning that as a human king, Jesus could have done much good for mankind.

Jesus, though, rejected that kind of thinking. His focus was on bearing witness to the truth.

¹³ In addition, Jesus was not distracted by a pursuit of riches. As a result, he did not live a life of wealth. He did not even have his own home. On one occasion, he said: "Foxes have dens and birds of heaven have roosts, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay down his head." (Matthew 8:20) When Jesus died, the only recorded thing of value that he owned was the garment over which the Roman soldiers cast lots. (John 19:23, 24) Was Jesus' life a failure, then? By no means!

11, 12. For what purpose did Jesus come into the world, and how did he keep his focus?

13, 14. (a) What failed to distract Jesus from his focus? (b) Although Jesus was materially poor, what did he accomplish?

¹⁴ Jesus accomplished far more than the wealthiest philanthropist ever could. Paul said: "You know the undeserved kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich he became poor for your sakes, that you might become rich through his poverty." (2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:5-8) Although materially poor, Jesus opened the



We will be effective in our ministry if we show the same concern for people that Jesus did

door for humble individuals to enjoy everlasting life in perfection. How grateful we are to him! And how we rejoice in the reward he received because he kept his focus on doing God's will!—Psalm 40:8; Acts 2:32, 33, 36.

¹⁵ Christians who today strive to imitate Jesus also refuse to be distracted by the pursuit

15. What is more valuable than wealth?

of wealth. (1 Timothy 6:9, 10) They acknowledge that riches can make life comfortable, but they know that wealth does nothing for their everlasting future. When a Christian dies, his material wealth is of no more value to him than Jesus' garment was to him when he died. (Ecclesiastes 2:10, 11, 17-19; 7:12) When a Christian dies, the only thing of real value that he possesses is his relationship with Jehovah and with Jesus Christ.—Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 16:9.

Not Deterred by Opposition

¹⁶ Opposition did not cause Jesus to lose his focus on bearing witness to the truth. Even knowing that his earthly ministry would end in a sacrificial death did not discourage him. Of Jesus, Paul said: "For the joy that was set before him he endured a torture stake, despising shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2) Notice that Jesus 'despised shame.' He was not troubled about what opponents thought of him. His focus was on doing God's will.

¹⁷ Applying the lesson of Jesus' endurance, Paul encourages Christians: "Consider closely the one who has endured such contrary talk by sinners against their own interests, that you may not get tired and give out in your souls." (Hebrews 12:3) True, it can be wearying to face opposition or mockery day after day. It can be tiring to keep resisting the allures of the world, perhaps to the disappointment of relatives who encourage us to "make something" of ourselves. However, like Jesus we look to Jehovah for support as we determinedly put the Kingdom first in our lives.—Matthew 6:33; Romans 15:13; 1 Corinthians 2:4.

¹⁸ Jesus' refusal to be distracted was

16. How did Jesus face up to opposition?
17. What can we learn from Jesus' endurance?
18. What fine lesson can we learn from Jesus' words to Peter?

demonstrated when he began to tell his disciples about his coming death. Peter encouraged Jesus to "be kind" to himself and assured him that he would "not have this destiny at all." Jesus refused to listen to anything that might weaken his resolve to do Jehovah's will. He turned his back on Peter and said: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, because you think, not God's thoughts, but those of men." (Matthew 16:21-23) May we always be equally determined to reject men's thoughts. Rather, let us always be guided by God's thoughts.

Bringing Real Benefits

¹⁹ Jesus performed many miracles to demonstrate that he was the Messiah. He even raised the dead. Those works attracted the crowds, but Jesus did not come to earth merely to do a social work. He came to bear witness to the truth. He knew that any material benefits he provided were temporary. Even the resurrected ones would die again. Only by bearing witness to the truth could he help some to gain everlasting life.—Luke 18:28-30.

²⁰ Today, some individuals try to imitate Jesus' good works by opening hospitals

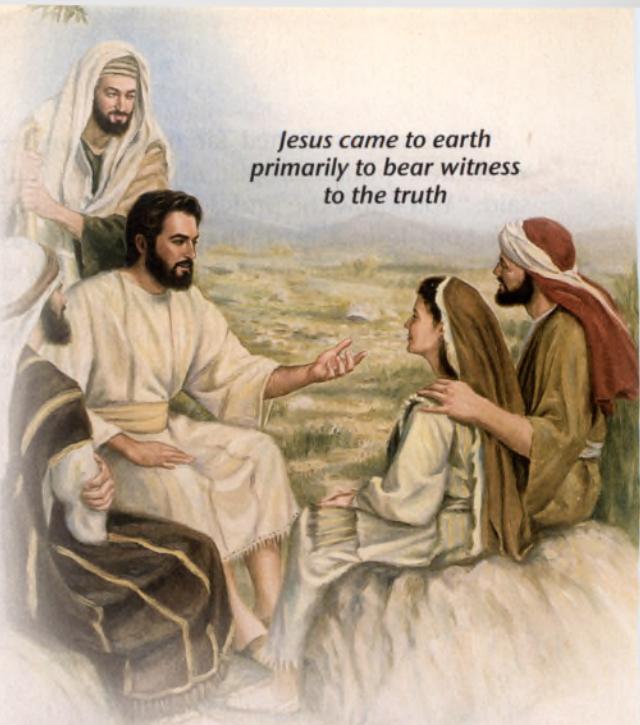
19. Although he was a miracle worker, what was the most important part of Jesus' ministry?

20, 21. What balance do true Christians maintain in the matter of good works?

Can You Answer?

- How can we benefit from the training Jesus gave his disciples?
- What was Jesus' attitude toward the people he preached to?
- What motivates us to give a thorough witness?
- In what ways can we keep our focus on doing God's will, as Jesus did?

Jesus came to earth primarily to bear witness to the truth



or performing other services among the world's poor. In some cases, they do this at great personal cost, and their sincerity is commendable; but any relief they supply is temporary at best. Only the Kingdom will bring permanent relief. Hence, Jehovah's Witnesses concentrate, as Jesus did, on bearing witness to the truth about that Kingdom.

²¹ Of course, true Christians do perform good works. Paul wrote: "As long as we have time favorable for it, let us work what is good toward all, but especially toward those related to us in the faith." (Galatians 6:10) In times of crisis or when someone is in need, we do not hesitate to "work what is good" to our neighbors or our Christian brothers. Still, we keep our main focus where it belongs—on bearing witness to the truth.

Learn From Jesus' Example

²² Paul wrote: "Really, woe is me if I did not declare the good news!" (1 Corinthians 9:16) He was not casual about the good news because preaching it meant life for himself

22. Why do Christians preach to their neighbors?

and his hearers. (1 Timothy 4:16) We view our ministry in the same way. We want to help our neighbors. We want to show our love for Jehovah. We want to prove our love for Jesus and our appreciation for his great love for us. Hence, we preach the good news and thus live "no more for the desires of men, but for God's will."—1 Peter 4:1, 2.

²³ Like Jesus, we do not lose our focus when others mock us or angrily reject our message. We learn a lesson from the miracle Jesus performed when he called Peter and Andrew to follow him. We see that if we obey Jesus and, so to speak, let down our nets even in seemingly unproductive waters, our fishing might produce results. Many

- 23, 24. (a) What lesson do we learn from the miracle of the fish? (b) Who today are giving a thorough witness?

Jehovah's Witnesses concentrate on giving a thorough witness

Christian fishermen have obtained a fine catch after years of work in seemingly barren waters. Others have been able to move to where the fishing is more productive and have obtained a fine catch there. Whatever we do, we will not stop letting down our nets. We know that Jesus has not yet declared the preaching work finished in any part of the earth.—Matthew 24:14.

²⁴ More than six million Witnesses of Jehovah are now busy in over 230 lands. The February 1, 2005, issue of *The Watchtower* will carry the annual worldwide report of their activity during the 2004 service year. That report will demonstrate Jehovah's rich blessing on the preaching work. In the time

that remains for this system of things, may we continue to take to heart Paul's stirring words: "Preach the word, be at it urgently." (2 Timothy 4:2) May we continue to give a thorough witness until Jehovah says that the work is finished.





WE LEARNED TO TRUST COMPLETELY IN JEHOVAH

AS TOLD BY
NATALIE HOLTORF

It was June 1945. One day that month, a pale-looking man appeared at our house and patiently stood at the front door. Startled, my youngest daughter, Ruth, shouted: "Mama, there is a stranger at the door!" Little did she know that the stranger was her father—my dear husband, Ferdinand. Two years earlier, only three days after Ruth was born, Ferdinand left home, was arrested, and ended up in a Nazi concentration camp. But now, at last, Ruth met her father, and our family was reunited. Ferdinand and I had so much to tell each other!

FERDINAND was born in 1909 in the city of Kiel, in Germany, and I was born in 1907 in the city of Dresden, also in Germany. When I was 12 years old, our family first came in contact with the Bible Students, as Jehovah's Witnesses were then known. At the age of 19, I left the Evangelical Church and dedicated my life to Jehovah.

Meanwhile, Ferdinand graduated from

nautical college and became a sailor. During his voyages, he pondered questions about the existence of a Creator. Back in port, Ferdinand visited his brother, who was a Bible Student. This visit was enough to convince him that the Bible had the answers to the questions that were troubling him. He left the Lutheran Church, and he also decided to quit working as a sailor. After spending his

first day in the preaching work, he felt a deep desire to do this work for the rest of his life. That same night, Ferdinand dedicated his life to Jehovah. He was baptized in August 1931.

A Sailor and a Preacher

In November 1931, Ferdinand boarded a train for the Netherlands to assist with the preaching work there.

When Ferdinand told the brother who organized the work in that country that he had been a sailor, the brother exclaimed: "You are just the man we need!" The brothers had rented a boat so that a group of pioneers (full-time ministers) could preach to those living along the waterways in the northern part of the country. The boat had a crew of five, but none of them could sail it. So Ferdinand became the skipper.

Six months later Ferdinand was asked to serve as a pioneer in Tilburg, in southern Netherlands. About that time I also arrived in Tilburg to serve as a pioneer, and I met Ferdinand. But right away we were asked to move to Groningen, in the northern part of the country. There, we were married in October 1932, and in a home used by several pioneers, we had our honeymoon while pioneering at the same time!

In 1935 our daughter Esther was born. Although we had little income, we were determined to keep on pioneering. We moved to a village, where we lived in a tiny house.

While I cared for the baby at home, my husband spent a long day in the ministry. The next day we traded places. This went on until Esther was old enough to come with us in the ministry.

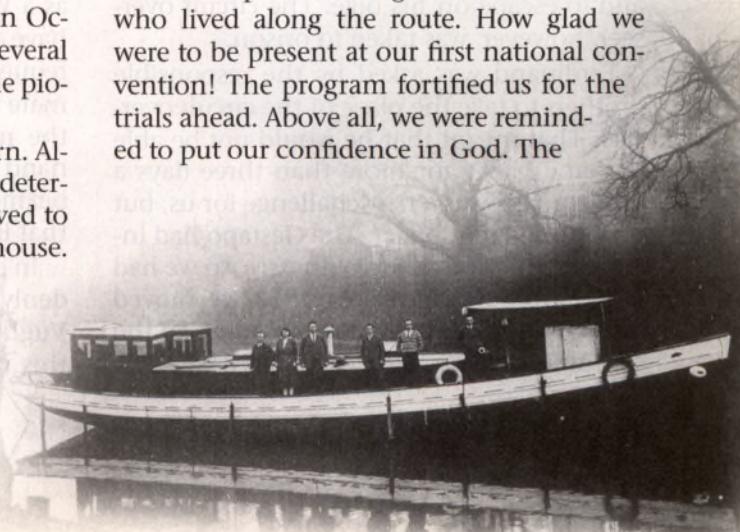
Not long thereafter, ominous clouds gathered on Europe's political horizon. We learned about the persecution of the Witnesses in Germany, and we realized that our turn would soon come. We wondered how we would fare under extreme persecution. In 1938 the Dutch authorities issued a decree forbidding foreigners to do colporteur work by distributing religious publications. To help us to continue in our ministry, Dutch Witnesses gave us the names of people who had shown interest in our work, and we were able to study the Bible with some of them.

About that time a convention of Jehovah's Witnesses was coming up. Although we lacked the funds to buy train tickets to travel to the convention site, we wanted to be there. So we set out on a three-day bicycle trip, with little Esther sitting in a handlebar seat. We spent the nights with Witnesses who lived along the route. How glad we were to be present at our first national convention! The program fortified us for the trials ahead. Above all, we were reminded to put our confidence in God. The



With Ferdinand in
October 1932

The evangelizing boat "Almina"
with its crew



words of Psalm 31:6 became our motto: "As for me, in Jehovah I do trust."

Hunted by the Nazis

In May 1940 the Nazis invaded the Netherlands. Shortly thereafter the Gestapo, or secret police, paid us a surprise visit while we were sorting out a shipment of Bible literature. Ferdinand was taken to the Gestapo headquarters. Esther and I regularly visited him there, and sometimes he was interrogated and beaten right in front of us. In December, Ferdinand was suddenly released, but his freedom was short-lived. One evening as we came home, we spotted a Gestapo car near the house. Ferdinand was able to get away while Esther and I entered the house. The Gestapo were waiting for us. They wanted Ferdinand. That same night after the Gestapo left, the Dutch police came and took me along for questioning. The next day Esther and I went into hiding in the home of a newly baptized Witness couple, the Norder family, who provided shelter and protection.

Toward the end of January 1941, a pioneer couple living in a houseboat were arrested. The next day a circuit overseer (traveling minister) and my husband went on board to retrieve some of the couple's belongings, but Gestapo collaborators pounced on them. Ferdinand managed to break loose and to escape on his bike. The circuit overseer, however, was taken to prison.

Ferdinand was asked by the responsible brothers to take the place of the circuit overseer. That meant that he would not be able to come home for more than three days a month. This was a new challenge for us, but I continued to pioneer. The Gestapo had intensified the search for Witnesses, so we had to keep on the move. In 1942 we moved three times. Eventually, we ended up in the city of Rotterdam, far away from where Fer-

dinand was carrying out his underground ministry. By that time I was expecting my second child. The Kamp family, whose two sons had recently been deported to concentration camps, kindly took us into their home.

The Gestapo Hot on Our Heels

Our second child, Ruth, was born in July 1943. After Ruth's birth, Ferdinand was able to stay with us for three days, but then he had to leave, and that was the last we saw of him for a long time. About three weeks later, Ferdinand was arrested in Amsterdam. He was taken to the Gestapo station, where his identity was confirmed. The Gestapo subjected him to intense interrogation in an effort to force him to give information about our preaching activities. But all that Ferdinand was willing to divulge was that he was one of Jehovah's Witnesses and that he was not involved in any political activity. The Gestapo officers were furious that Ferdinand, a German national, had not reported for military duty, and they threatened to execute him as a traitor.

For the next five months, Ferdinand was kept in a prison cell, where he endured constant threats of being executed by a firing squad. Yet, he did not waver in his loyalty to Jehovah. What helped him to stay spiritually strong? God's Word, the Bible. Of course, as a Witness, Ferdinand was not allowed to have a Bible. However, other prisoners could request one. So Ferdinand convinced his cell mate to ask his family to send a Bible, which the man did. Years later, whenever Ferdinand spoke about this episode, his eyes beamed and he exclaimed: "What comfort that Bible gave me!"

In early January 1944, Ferdinand was suddenly taken to a concentration camp in Vught, in the Netherlands. Unexpectedly, this move proved to be a blessing for him

because there he met 46 other Witnesses. When I learned of his relocation, I was so happy to know that he was still alive!

Preaching Without Letup in the Concentration Camp

Life in camp was very rough. Serious malnutrition, lack of warm clothing, and bitter cold were the order of the day. Ferdinand contracted a serious case of tonsillitis. After a long and chilly roll call, he reported to sick bay. Patients with a fever of 104 degrees Fahrenheit or higher were allowed to stay. But no break for Ferdinand, for his temperature was only 102 degrees Fahrenheit! He was told to go back to work. Sympathetic fellow prisoners, however, helped him by hiding him for short periods of time in a warm area. Further relief came when the weather got warmer. Also, when some of the brothers received food packages, they shared the contents with others, so Ferdinand regained some of his strength.

Before my husband was imprisoned, preaching had been his way of life, and inside the camp he continued to share his beliefs. Camp officials often made sneering remarks at him about his purple triangle, the insignia that identified a prisoner as a Witness. But Ferdinand viewed such remarks as an opportunity to start a conversation with them. Initially, the preaching territory of the brothers was confined to the barracks that mainly housed Witnesses. The brothers asked themselves, 'How can we reach more prisoners?' Unwittingly, the camp administration provided a solution. How?

The brothers had a secret supply of Bible literature and also 12 Bibles. One day the guards found some literature, but they could not find out whom it belonged to. So the camp officials decided that the unity of the Witnesses had to be broken. Therefore, as punishment all brothers were relocated to

barracks occupied by non-Witness prisoners. Moreover, the brothers had to sit next to non-Witnesses while eating. This arrangement proved to be a blessing. Now the brothers could do what they had wanted to do in the first place—preach to as many of the inmates as possible.

Raising Two Girls Alone

Meanwhile, my two daughters and I were still living in Rotterdam. The winter of 1943/44 was exceptionally harsh. Behind our house was a battery of antiaircraft artillery manned by German soldiers. In front of us was the Waal Harbor, a prime target for Allied bombers. It was not exactly the safest place to hide. Furthermore, food was scarce. More than ever, we learned to put our complete trust in Jehovah.—Proverbs 3:5, 6.

Eight-year-old Esther helped our small family by standing in line at a soup kitchen. However, often when her turn came to collect food, there was nothing left. During one of her trips in search of food, she was caught in the midst of an air raid. I panicked when I heard the explosions, but soon my anxiety gave way to tears of joy when she returned unhurt and even in possession of a few sugar beets. "What happened?" were my first words. Calmly she replied: "When the bombs fell, I did just what Daddy told me to do, 'Fall flat on the ground, keep lying down, and pray.' And it worked!"

Because of my German accent, it was safer that Esther did what little shopping was still possible. This did not escape the attention of the German soldiers, who began to question Esther. But she did not give away any secrets. At home, I gave Esther Bible education, and because she could not attend school, I taught her reading and writing and other skills.

Esther also helped me in the ministry. Before I went out to study the Bible with



With Ferdinand and the children

someone, Esther went ahead of me to see if the coast was clear, so to speak. She verified if the signs that I had agreed upon with the Bible student were in place. For example, the person whom I was going to visit would place a flowerpot in a certain position on the windowsill to let me know that I could come in. During the Bible study, Esther stayed outside to watch for signs of danger while she pushed the carriage with little Ruth up and down the street.

To Sachsenhausen

How was Ferdinand faring? In September 1944, he along with many others were marched off to a railway station where groups of 80 prisoners were squeezed into waiting boxcars. Each car had one bucket that served as a toilet and one bucket for drinking water. The journey lasted three days and nights, and there was standing room only! There was hardly any ventilation. The boxcars were closed in with only a peephole here and there. The heat, hunger,

and thirst—not to mention the stench—they had to endure defies description.

The train ground to a halt at the infamous Sachsenhausen concentration camp. All prisoners were deprived of any personal belongings they still had—except for the 12 small Bibles that the Witnesses had taken along on the journey!

Ferdinand and eight other brothers were sent to a satellite camp in Rathenow to work on the production of war equipment. Although they were often threatened with execution, the brothers refused to do that type of work. To encourage one another to stay firm, in the morning they would share a Bible verse, such as Psalm 18:2, so that they could meditate on it during the day. This helped them to meditate on spiritual matters.

Finally, the roar of artillery announced the approach of Allied and Russian troops. The Russians arrived first at the camp where Ferdinand and his companions were. They gave the prisoners some food and ordered them to leave the camp. By the end of April 1945, the Russian army permitted them to leave for home.

Finally Together as a Family

On June 15, Ferdinand arrived in the Netherlands. The brothers in Groningen gave him a warm welcome. He soon learned that we were alive, living somewhere in the country, and we received word that he had returned. Waiting for his arrival seemed to last for ages. But finally, one day little Ruth called out: "Mama, there is a stranger at the door!" There was our beloved husband and father!

Scores of problems needed to be resolved before we could function as a normal family again. We did not have a place to live, and a major challenge was that of regaining

our status as permanent residents. Since we were Germans, for several years the Dutch officials treated us as outcasts. Eventually, though, we were able to settle down and take up the life we so deeply longed for—that of serving Jehovah together as a family.

"In Jehovah I Do Trust"

In later years, whenever Ferdinand and I got together with some of our friends who like us lived through those days of hardship, we recalled Jehovah's loving guidance in those difficult times. (Psalm 7:1) We rejoiced that through the years, Jehovah allowed us to have a share in the furthering of King-

dom interests. We also often said how happy we were that we spent our youth in Jehovah's sacred service.—Ecclesiastes 12:1.

After the period of Nazi persecution, Ferdinand and I served Jehovah together for more than 50 years before he finished his earthly course on December 20, 1995. Soon, I will be 98 years old. Daily, I thank Jehovah that our children were so supportive during those difficult years and that I am still able to do what I can in his service to the glory of his name. I am grateful for all that Jehovah has done for me, and it is my heart's desire to continue to live up to my motto: "As for me, in Jehovah I do trust."—Psalm 31:6.

How to Protect Your Children by Means of Godly Wisdom

EVERY day our bodies are at war. They must fight off a host of microbes, parasites, and viruses. Thankfully, most of us have inherited an immune system that protects us against such attacks and saves us from falling prey to numerous infectious diseases.

In a similar way, Christians must fight against unscriptural thinking and values and against the pressures that can destroy our spiritual health. (2 Corinthians 11:3) In order to resist this daily attack on our minds and hearts, we need to develop spiritual defenses.

Such defenses are especially necessary for our children, since they are not born with spiritual defenses that can counter the spirit of the world. (Ephesians 2:2) As children grow up, it is vital for parents to help them develop their own defenses. On what do those defenses depend? The Bible explains: "Jehovah himself gives wisdom; . . . he will guard the very way of his loyal ones." (Proverbs 2:6, 8) Divine wisdom can guard the way of young

ones who might otherwise succumb to harmful association, peer pressure, or unwholesome entertainment. How can parents follow Jehovah's guidance and instill godly wisdom?

Seeking Upbuilding Association

Understandably, teenagers like the company of other teenagers, but exclusive companionship with other inexperienced ones will not promote godly wisdom. "Foolishness is tied up with the heart of a boy," warns the proverb. (Proverbs 22:15) How, then, have some parents helped their children apply godly wisdom in this matter of association?

A father named Don* said: "Our boys spent considerable time with friends of their own age-group, but most of that time was spent in our home, in our presence. We kept an open house that was invariably full of young ones, whom we fed and made feel welcome. We were happy to put up with the noise and

* Some names in this article have been changed.

commotion in our house for the sake of providing a safe environment in which our children could enjoy themselves."

Brian and Mary have three fine children but freely admit that training them has not always been easy. They related: "In our congregation, there were few young ones in their late teens to associate with our daughter Jane. She did, however, have one friend by the name of Susan, who was an outgoing, cheerful young person. Her parents, though, were more liberal than we were. Susan was allowed to stay out later than Jane, wear shorter skirts, listen to questionable music, and see unsuitable movies. For a long time, Jane had difficulty in seeing our point of view. To her, Susan's parents seemed more understanding, whereas we came across as being too strict. Only when Susan got in trouble did Jane realize that our firmness had served to protect her. We are very glad we didn't weaken in our stand for what we believed was right for our daughter."

Like Jane, many young people have learned the wisdom of seeking their parents' guidance in this matter of association. "The ear that is listening to the reproof of life lodges right in among wise people," says the proverb. (Proverbs 15:31) Godly wisdom leads young ones to seek the company of up-building friends.

Coping With the Pressure to Conform

Closely related to association is peer pressure. Day after day, the pressure to conform attacks our children's defenses. Since youths usually seek the approval of those in their own age-group, peer pressure can squeeze them into the mold that the world views as desirable.—Proverbs 29:25.

The Bible reminds us that "the world is passing away and so is its desire." (1 John 2: 17) Thus, parents should not allow their children to be overly influenced by the world's views. How can they help their children to think in a Christian way?

"My daughter always wanted to wear what other young ones were wearing," said Richard. "So we patiently reasoned with her on the merits and demerits of each request. Even with those fashions we judged unobjectionable, we followed the counsel we heard some years ago, 'It is a wise person who is not the first to adopt a new fashion nor the last to leave it.'

A mother named Pauline counteracted peer pressure in another way. She recalled: "I took an interest in my children's interests and regularly went to their room to talk to them. These long conversations enabled me to shape their ideas and help them to consider other ways of looking at matters."

Peer pressure will not go away, so parents

"We kept an open house that was invariably full of young ones"



will likely face a constant struggle to 'overturn worldly reasonings' and help their children to bring their thoughts 'into captivity, in obedience to the Christ.' (2 Corinthians 10:5) But by 'persevering in prayer,' both parents and children will be strengthened to complete this vital task.—Romans 12:12; Psalm 65:2.

The Powerful Attraction of Entertainment

A third influence that parents may find it hard to deal with is entertainment. Naturally, young children love to play. Many older children also eagerly seek amusement. (2 Timothy 2:22, footnote) But if satisfied in an unwise way, this desire can break down their spiritual defenses. The danger mainly comes in two forms.

First, much entertainment reflects the world's debased moral standards. (Ephesians 4:17-19) Yet, it is invariably presented in an exciting and attractive way. This poses a real danger for young ones, who may not perceive the pitfalls.

Second, the amount of time spent in entertainment can also cause problems. For some, having fun becomes the most important thing in life, absorbing far too much time and energy. The proverb warns that "the eating of too much honey is not good." (Proverbs 25:27) Likewise, too much entertainment will dull the appetite for spiritual sustenance and lead to mental laziness. (Proverbs 21:17; 24:30-34) Enjoying this world to the full will hinder youths from getting "a firm hold on the real life"—everlasting life in God's new world. (1 Timothy 6:12, 19) How have parents coped with the challenge?

Take an interest in your children's interests



Mari Carmen, a mother of three daughters, said: "We wanted our daughters to have wholesome recreation and to enjoy themselves.

So we regularly went out as a family, and they also spent time with friends in the congregation. But we kept recreation in its place. We likened it to the dessert at the end of a meal—sweet but not the main course. They learned to become workers at home, at school, and in the congregation."

Don and Ruth did not leave entertainment to chance either.

"We made a habit of dedicating Saturday as 'family day,'" they explained. "We would share in the field ministry in the morning, go swimming in the afternoon, and have a special meal in the evening."

The comments of these parents show the value of balance in providing wholesome entertainment and in assigning it to its proper place in a Christian's life.—Ecclesiastes 3:4; Philippians 4:5.

Trust in Jehovah

Spiritual defenses, of course, take many years to develop. There is no miracle drug that will impart godly wisdom, motivating children to trust in their heavenly Father. Rather, parents have to "go on bringing them up in the discipline and mental-regulating of Jehovah." (Ephesians 6:4) This ongoing "mental-regulating" means helping children to view things the way God does. How can parents accomplish that?

A regular family Bible study is a key to success. The study 'uncovers the children's eyes so that they may see the wonderful things out of God's law.' (Psalm 119:18) Diego took



"I prepared thoroughly for the study"

the family study very seriously and thus helped his children draw closer to Jehovah. "I prepared thoroughly for the study," he said. "By doing research in Scriptural publications, I learned to make the Bible characters come to life. I encouraged the children to identify with the faithful ones. This gave my children a vivid reminder of what pleases Jehovah."

Children also learn in informal settings. Moses exhorted parents to speak of Jehovah's reminders 'when they sat in their house and when they walked on the road and when they lay down and when they got up.' (Deut-

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teronomy 6:7) One father explained: "My son needs time to open his heart and express his feelings. When we go for a walk or do a job together, he eventually gets around to unburdening himself. On these occasions, we have some fine talks that benefit us both."

The prayers said by parents also make a profound impression on their children. To hear their parents humbly approach God to request his help and forgiveness moves children to "believe that he is." (Hebrews 11:6) Many successful parents stress the importance of family prayers, among them prayers that include school matters and other things that are worrying their children. One father said that his wife always prays with the children before they leave for school.—Psalm 62:8; 112:7.

"Let Us Not Give Up in Doing What Is Fine"

All parents make mistakes and may regret the way that they handled certain situations. Nevertheless, the Bible urges us to keep trying, not to "give up in doing what is fine."—Galatians 6:9.

Parents may feel like giving up, however, when they at times just can't understand their children. It would be easy to conclude that the younger generation is different and difficult. But, really, children today have the same weaknesses that earlier generations had, and they face similar temptations, although the pressure to transgress may have increased. Therefore, one father, after correcting his son, softened his words by kindly adding: "Your heart only wants to do what my heart wanted to do when I was your age." Parents might not know much about computers, but they know all about the leanings of the imperfect flesh.—Matthew 26:41; 2 Corinthians 2:11.

Perhaps some children express little en-

thusiasm for their parents' guidance and even rebel against the discipline they receive. Once again, however, endurance is essential. Despite initial reluctance or periods of defiance, many children eventually respond. (Proverbs 22:6; 23:22-25) Matthew, a young Christian now serving at a branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses, related: "When I was a teenager, I felt that my parents' restrictions were unfair. After all, I reasoned, if my friends' parents permitted something, why couldn't mine? And I got really annoyed when they, at times, punished me by not allowing me to go canoeing—something I loved. Looking back, however, I realize that the discipline my parents gave me was both effective and necessary. I am grateful that they gave me the guidance I needed when I needed it."

There is no doubt about it—although our children may sometimes have to be in an un-

healthy spiritual environment, they can still grow up to be fine Christians. As the Bible promises, godly wisdom can give them spiritual defenses. "When wisdom enters into your heart and knowledge itself becomes pleasant to your very soul, thinking ability itself will keep guard over you, discernment itself will safeguard you, to deliver you from the bad way."—Proverbs 2:10-12.

Carrying a child in the womb for nine months is not an easy task. And the following 20 years may bring their share of pain along with happiness. But because they love their children, Christian parents strive with all their might to protect them with godly wisdom. They feel about their children as did the aged apostle John regarding his spiritual children: "No greater cause for thankfulness do I have than these things, that I should be hearing that my children go on walking in the truth."—3 John 4.

Beware of Customs That Displease God

IN A small courtyard, a coffin lies open under the hot African sun. As mourners file past it to express their grief, an old man pauses. His eyes filled with sorrow, he leans close to the dead man's face and begins speaking: "Why did you not tell me you were going? Why did you leave me like this? Now that you have returned, will you continue to help me?"

In another part of Africa, a baby is born. Nobody is allowed to see the child. Only after some time has passed is the baby brought

out into public view and ceremonially given a name.

To some people, talking to a dead person or hiding a newborn child from the sight of others may seem to be strange behavior. However, in certain cultures and societies, the conduct and views of people toward death and birth are influenced by a very powerful belief that the dead are really not dead but are alive and conscious.

This belief is so strong that it is woven into the fabric of customs and rituals that involve almost all aspects of life. For instance, millions believe that important stages in one's life—such as birth, puberty, marriage, child-bearing, and death—are parts of a passage leading into the spirit realm of the ancestors. There, it is believed, the dead person

continues to play an active role in the lives of those he left behind. And he can continue the cycle of life through rebirth.

To ensure a smooth transition between all stages of this cycle, numerous customs and rites are performed. These customs are influenced by the belief that something inside us survives death. True Christians avoid any customs associated with this belief. Why?

What Is the Condition of the Dead?

The Bible is clear when it describes the condition of the dead. It simply states: "The living are conscious that they will die; but as for the dead, they are conscious of nothing at all . . . Their love and their hate and their jealousy have already perished . . . There is no work nor devising nor knowledge nor wisdom in Sheol [mankind's common grave], the place to which you are going." (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10) True worshipers of God have long embraced this basic Bible truth. They have understood that the soul, rather than being immortal, can die and be destroyed. (Ezekiel 18:4) They have also known that spirits of the dead do not exist. (Psalm 146:4) In ancient times, Jehovah strictly commanded his people to separate themselves completely from any custom or ritual that was associated with the belief that the dead are conscious and are able to influence the living.—Deuteronomy 14:1; 18:9-13; Isaiah 8:19, 20.

First-century Christians likewise avoided any traditional custom or rite that was associated with false religious teaching. (2 Corinthians 6:15-17) Today, Jehovah's Witnesses, regardless of race, tribe, or background, shun traditions and customs that are connected with the false teaching that something in man survives death.

What can guide us as Christians in deciding whether to observe a certain custom or not? We must carefully think about its possi-

ble connection to any unscriptural teaching, such as the belief that spirits of the dead influence the lives of the living. Further, we need to consider if our sharing in such a custom or ceremony might stumble others who know what Jehovah's Witnesses believe and teach. With those points in mind, let us examine two areas of concern—birth and death.

Birth and Child-Naming Ceremonies

Many customs associated with childbirth are appropriate. However, in places where birth is viewed as a passing over from the realm of the ancestor spirits to that of the human community, true Christians must exercise care. In some parts of Africa, for example, a newborn child is kept indoors and is not given a name until a period of time has passed. While the waiting period may vary according to locality, it ends with a child-naming ceremony, in which the child is brought outdoors and is formally presented to relatives and friends. At that time, the child's name is officially announced to those present.

Explaining the significance of this custom, the book *Ghana—Understanding the People and Their Culture* states: "During the first seven days of its life, a baby is considered to be on a 'visit' and undergoing a transition from the world of spirits to earthly life. . . . The baby is normally kept indoors and people outside the family are not allowed to see it."

Why is there a waiting period before the child is ceremonially named? The book *Ghana in Retrospect* explains: "Before the eighth day, the child is not supposed to be human. He is more or less associated with the other world from which he has come." The book continues: "Since it is the name that, as it were, humanizes a child, when a couple fear that their child will die they will

usually defer naming him until they are sure he will live.... Therefore this rite of passage, sometimes called outdooring of the child, is thought to be of tremendous consequences for the child and his parents. It is the ceremony that ushers the child into the company or world of human beings."

A senior relative of the family usually officiates during such a child-naming ceremony. Aspects of the occasion vary from place to place, but the ceremony often includes the pouring of a libation, prayers offered to the ancestral spirits expressing appreciation for the child's safe arrival, and other rituals.

The highlight of the ceremony comes when the name of the child is announced. Although the parents are responsible for the naming of their own child, other relatives often have a strong influence on the name chosen. Some names may carry a symbolic meaning in the local language, such as "gone and returned," "Mother has come a second time," or "Father has come again." Other names contain meanings designed to discourage the ancestors from taking the newborn child back into the world of the dead.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with rejoicing over the birth of a child. Naming a child after someone else and giving a name that reflects the circumstances associated with its birth are acceptable customs, and deciding when to give a child its name is a personal decision. However, Christians who want to please God are careful to avoid any customs or ceremonies that give the impression that they are in agreement with the view that the newborn child is a "visitor" passing from the spirit world of the ancestors to the world of the living community.

In addition, while many in the community view the naming ceremony as an impor-

tant rite of passage, Christians should be sensitive to the consciences of others and consider the impression that is given to unbelievers. What might some conclude, for example, if a Christian family kept their newborn child from the view of others until a naming ceremony was performed? What would be the impression if names that contradicted their claim to be teachers of Bible truth were used?

Hence, when deciding how and when to name their children, Christians strive to "do all things for God's glory" so as not to become a cause for stumbling. (1 Corinthians 10:31-33) They do not 'set aside the commandment of God in order to retain traditions' that are ultimately designed to honor the dead. On the contrary, they give honor and glory to the living God, Jehovah.—Mark 7:9, 13.

Passing From Death to Life

Death, like birth, is considered by many to be a transition; one who dies moves from the visible world into the invisible realm of the spirits of the dead. Many believe that unless certain funeral customs and rites are performed at a person's death, the ancestor spirits, who are believed to have the power to punish or reward the living, will be angered. This belief greatly influences the way funerals are arranged and conducted.

Funerals that are intended to appease the dead often involve a whole range of emotions—from frantic wailing and shouting in the presence of the corpse to joyous festivities after the burial. Unrestrained feasting, drunkenness, and dancing to loud music often characterize such funeral celebrations. So much importance is attached to funerals that even the poorest of families often make great effort to gather enough funds to provide "a fitting burial," though it might bring hardship and debt.

Throughout the years, Jehovah's Witnesses have thoroughly exposed unscriptural funeral customs.* Such customs include wakes, the pouring of libations, talking to and making requests of the dead, ceremonial observances of funeral anniversaries, and other customs based on the belief that something in a person survives death. Such God-dishonoring customs are "unclean," an "empty deception" based on "the tradition of men" and not on God's Word of truth.—Isaiah 52:11; Colossians 2:8.

Pressure to Conform

Avoiding traditional customs has proved to be a challenge for some, especially in lands where honoring the dead is considered extremely important. Because of not following such customs, Jehovah's Witnesses have been viewed with suspicion or have been accused of being antisocial and disrespectful of the dead. Criticism and strong pressure have caused some, despite their correct understanding of Bible truth, to be afraid to stand out as different. (1 Peter 3:14) Others have felt that these customs are part of their culture and cannot be completely avoided. Still others have reasoned that refusing to follow custom may prejudice the community against God's people.

We do not want to offend others needlessly. Still, the Bible warns us that taking a firm stand for truth will result in the disapproval of a world alienated from God. (John 15:18, 19; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 John 5:19) We willingly take such a stand, knowing that we must be different from those who are in spiritual darkness. (Malachi 3:18; Galatians 6:12) Just as Jesus resisted Satan's temptation to do something that displeased God, so we resist

* Please see the brochures *Spirits of the Dead—Can They Help You or Harm You? Do They Really Exist?* and *The Road to Everlasting Life—Have You Found It?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

the pressure to act in a way that displeases God. (Matthew 4:3-7) Rather than being influenced by fear of man, true Christians are primarily concerned with pleasing Jehovah God and honoring him as the God of truth. They do so by not compromising Bible standards of pure worship because of pressure from others.—Proverbs 29:25; Acts 5:29.

Respecting the Dead —Honoring Jehovah

It is normal to feel deep emotional pain and grief when someone we love dies. (John 11:33, 35) Cherishing the memory of a loved one and providing a respectful burial are fitting and appropriate expressions of our love. However, Jehovah's Witnesses cope with the immense sadness of death without being drawn into any traditional practices that displease God. This is not easy for those who have been raised in cultures where there is strong fear of the dead. It can be a challenge to keep our balance when we are emotionally pained by the death of someone close to us. Nevertheless, faithful Christians are strengthened by Jehovah, "the God of all comfort," and benefit from the loving support of fellow believers. (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4) Their strong faith that unconscious dead ones in God's memory will one day live again gives true Christians every reason to separate themselves completely from unchristian funeral customs that deny the reality of the resurrection.

Are we not thrilled that Jehovah has called us "out of darkness into his wonderful light"? (1 Peter 2:9) As we experience the joy of birth and endure the sadness of death, may our strong desire to do what is right and our deep love for Jehovah God always move us to "go on walking as children of light." May we never allow ourselves to be spiritually contaminated by unchristian customs that displease God.—Ephesians 5:8.

Questions From Readers

Does Stephen's exclamation at Acts 7:59 indicate that prayers should be directed to Jesus?

Acts 7:59 says: "They went on casting stones at Stephen as he made appeal and said: 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'" Those words have raised questions in the mind of some, since the Bible says that Jehovah is the "Hearer of Prayer." (Psalm 65:2) Did Stephen really pray to Jesus? Would this indicate that Jesus is the same as Jehovah?

The King James Version says that Stephen was "calling upon God." Understandably, then, many draw the conclusion reached by Bible commentator Matthew Henry, who said: "Stephen here prays to Christ, and so must we." However, that viewpoint is erroneous. Why?

Barnes' Notes on the New Testament makes this honest admission: "The word God is not in the original, and should not have been in the translation. It is in none of the ancient [manuscripts] or versions." How did the word "God" come to be inserted into that verse? Scholar Abiel Abbot Livermore called this "an instance of the sectarian biases of the translators." Most modern translations, therefore, eliminate this spurious reference to God.

Nevertheless, many versions do say that Stephen "prayed" to Jesus. And the footnote in the *New World Translation* shows that the term "made appeal" can also mean "invocation; prayer." Would that not indicate that Jesus is Almighty God? No. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* explains that in this setting, the original Greek word, *e-pi-ka-le'o*, means: "To

call upon, invoke; . . . to appeal to an authority." Paul used this same word when he declared: "I appeal to Caesar!" (Acts 25:11) Appropriately, then, *The New English Bible* says that Stephen "called out" to Jesus.

What prompted Stephen to make such an appeal? According to Acts 7:55, 56, Stephen, "being full of holy spirit, gazed into heaven and caught sight of God's glory and of Jesus standing at God's right hand." Normally, Stephen would have addressed his requests to Jehovah in the name of Jesus. But seeing the resurrected Jesus in vision, Stephen apparently felt free to appeal to him directly, saying: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Stephen knew that Jesus had been given authority to raise the dead. (John 5:27-29) He therefore asked Jesus to safeguard his spirit, or life force, until the day when Jesus would raise him to immortal life in the heavens.

Does Stephen's brief utterance set a precedent for praying to Jesus? Not at all. For one thing, Stephen clearly distinguished Jesus from Jehovah, for the account says that he saw Jesus "standing at God's right hand." Also, these circumstances were exceptional. The only other case of such an utterance being directed to Jesus is that of the apostle John, who similarly addressed Jesus directly when he saw Him in vision.—Revelation 22:16, 20.

Although Christians today properly direct all their prayers to Jehovah God, they too have unshakable faith that Jesus is "the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25) As it did Stephen, so faith in Jesus' ability to raise his followers from the dead can help and sustain us in times of trial.



Mealtimes

More Than Just a Time to Eat!

EVERYONE enjoys a fine meal. Add to the meal good conversation and warm association with people you love, and it becomes a delightful event that satisfies more than just our hunger. Many families make it a practice to gather together at least once a day to share a meal. Mealtimes give a family the opportunity to discuss the day's events or plans. Parents who listen to their children's comments and expressions get a glimpse of the thinking and feelings of their young ones. Over time, the happy, relaxed association enjoyed at mealtimes builds within a family a sense of security, trust, and love that adds stability to the family unit.

Today, because many family members are busy and always on the move, they find it difficult to meet together for a meal. In some parts of the world, local culture frowns upon a family eating together or even talking during mealtimes. Other families have the habit of turning on the TV during the meal, effectively robbing themselves of any meaningful communication.

Christian parents, however, are always alert to opportunities to build up their

households. (Proverbs 24:27) Long ago, parents were told that one of the best opportunities to communicate God's word to their children was 'when they sit in their house.' (Deuteronomy 6:7) Regularly sitting down together for a meal offers parents a unique chance to build within their children a deeper love for Jehovah and his righteous principles. By cultivating a happy and relaxed atmosphere, you can make mealtimes an enjoyable and upbuilding experience for your family too. Yes, make mealtimes more than just a time to eat!

