

SEPTEMBER 1, 1996

# THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

A woman with white hair and glasses, wearing a pink jacket, holds a young child in a rose garden. The child, wearing a white dress with a red rose pattern and a white bonnet with red roses, looks up at the woman. The background is filled with red roses.

**Is Your Life  
Controlled  
by Fate?**

# 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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# Is Your Life Controlled by Fate?

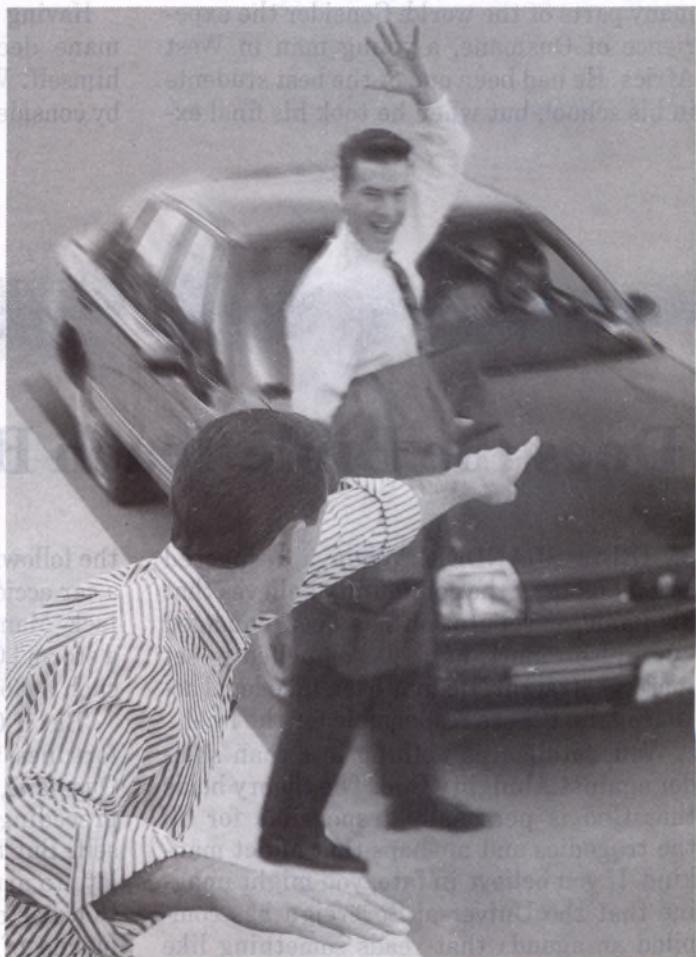
**A**LA NÒ DON." In the Bambara language of Mali, West Africa, this expression means, "It is the work of God." Slogans like this are quite common in that part of the world. In the Wolof tongue, the saying goes, "Yallah mo ko def" (God did it). And in one Dogon country-dialect, they say, "Ama biray" (God caused it).

These expressions have their counterparts in other lands. Sayings like, "His time had come" and, "It was the will of God" are often heard whenever death or tragedy strikes. In West Africa, slogans such as "Man proposes, God disposes" are commonly painted on public transport vehicles and are posted as signs in shops. For many they are merely figures of speech. Oftentimes, though, they reflect a deep-seated belief in fatalism.

Just what is fatalism? *The World Book Encyclopedia* defines it as "the belief that events are determined by forces that human beings cannot control." What are these "forces"? Thousands of years ago, the Babylonians believed that an individual's fate was strongly influenced by the configuration of the stars at his birth. (Compare Isaiah 47: 13.) The Greeks believed that fate was in the hands of three powerful goddesses who spun, measured, and cut the thread of life. However, it was Christendom's theologians who came up

with the idea that God himself determines a person's fate!

"Saint" Augustine, for example, rejected the "false and noxious opinions" of astrologers. On the other hand, he argued that "to confess that God exists, and at the same time to deny that He has foreknowledge of future things, is the most manifest folly." He claimed that for God to be truly



almighty, he must "know all things before they come to pass" leaving "nothing unordained." Yet, Augustine passionately argued that in spite of God's knowing in advance all that occurs, humans still possess free will.—*The City of God*, Book V, Chapters 7-9.

Centuries later, Protestant theologian John Calvin took matters a step further, arguing that while some are "predestined [by God] to be children and heirs of the heavenly kingdom," others are predestined to be "recipients of his wrath"!

Today, belief in fate is taken seriously in many parts of the world. Consider the experience of Ousmane, a young man in West Africa. He had been one of the best students in his school, but when he took his final ex-

ams, he failed! This meant not only repeating a year of school but also suffering embarrassment before his family and friends. A friend tried to console him by saying that it was God's will. Ousmane's mother similarly blamed fate for his failure.

At first Ousmane was happy to accept their attempts at sympathy. After all, if his failure really was God's will, there was nothing he could have done to prevent it. But his father saw things differently. He told Ousmane that failing the exams was his own fault—not God's. Ousmane failed simply because he had neglected his studies.

Having had his faith in fate shaken, Ousmane decided to investigate matters for himself. We now invite you to do the same by considering the following article.

## Does the Bible Teach Belief in Fate?

**L**IBEL! SLANDER! When a respected member of the community believes that his name or reputation has been damaged by a false report, he feels compelled to set matters straight. He may even take legal action against those responsible for the libel.

Well, fatalism is nothing less than slander against Almighty God. The theory holds that God is personally responsible for all the tragedies and mishaps that afflict mankind. If you believe in fate, you might imagine that the Universal Sovereign has compiled an agenda that reads something like

the following: 'Today, John will be injured in a car accident, Fatou will have a malaria attack, Mamadou's house will be destroyed in a storm'! Could you really be moved to serve such a God?

'But if God is not responsible for our misfortunes, then who is?' ask believers in fate. Ousmane, the young man mentioned in the preceding article, wondered about this himself. But he did not have to guess or speculate to arrive at the truth. He learned that God has cleared himself of this slander by means of the teachings found in His in-

spired Word, the Bible. (2 Timothy 3:16) Let us consider, then, what the Bible says on this subject.

### Who Is to Blame?

Floods, storms, earthquakes—such catastrophes are often called acts of God. Yet the Bible does not indicate that God causes such disasters. Consider a tragedy that occurred centuries ago in the Middle East. The Bible tells us that the sole survivor of this catastrophe reported: “The very fire of God [Hebrew expression often meaning lightning] fell from the heavens and went blazing among the sheep and the attendants and eating them up.”—Job 1:16.

While this terrified man may have thought that God was accountable for the fire, the Bible shows that He was not to blame. Read Job 1:7-12 for yourself, and you will learn that the lightning was caused, not by God, but by his Adversary—Satan the Devil! Not that all mishaps are the direct work of Satan. But clearly, there is no reason to blame God.

In reality, *people* are often to blame when things go wrong. Failures at school, at work, or in social relations may result from a lack of effort and good training or perhaps from a lack of consideration for others. Likewise, illnesses, accidents, and deaths may be the result of negligence. Why, simply wearing a seat belt while driving greatly reduces the likelihood of one’s being killed in a car accident. A seat belt would not make any difference if unalterable “fate” were at work. Proper medical care and sanitation also dramatically reduce the number of premature deaths. Even some disasters commonly labeled “acts of God” are, in fact, acts of man—the sad legacy of man’s mismanagement of the earth.—Compare Revelation 11:18.

### “Time and Unforeseen Occurrence”

True, there are many sad events for which the causes are not clearly evident. Note,

though, what the Bible says at Ecclesiastes 9:11: “I returned to see under the sun that the swift do not have the race, nor the mighty ones the battle, nor do the wise also have the food, nor do the understanding ones also have the riches, nor do even those having knowledge have the favor; because *time and unforeseen occurrence* befall them all.” There is therefore no reason to believe that the Creator is behind accidents or that victims of accidents are in some way being punished.

Jesus Christ himself argued against fatalistic reasoning. Referring to a tragedy that was well-known to his listeners, Jesus asked: “Those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, thereby killing them, do you imagine that they were proved greater debtors than all other men inhabiting Jerusalem? No, indeed, I tell you.” (Luke 13:4, 5) Jesus evidently attributed the disaster, not to God’s intervention, but to “time and unforeseen occurrence.”

### The Ravages of Imperfection

What, though, about unexplained deaths and illnesses? The Bible gives this blunt description of the human condition: “In Adam all are dying.” (1 Corinthians 15:22) Death has afflicted mankind since our forefather Adam trod the path of disobedience. Just as God had warned, Adam left his offspring a legacy of death. (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12) Ultimately, then, all illnesses can be traced to our common ancestor Adam. Our inherited weaknesses also have much to do with the disappointments and failures we experience in life.—Psalm 51:5.

Consider the problem of poverty. Belief in fate has often encouraged sufferers to resign themselves to their difficult existence. ‘This is our destiny,’ they believe. The Bible shows, however, that human imperfection, not fate, is to blame. Some become poor when they ‘reap what they have sown’

through laziness or mismanagement of resources. (Galatians 6:7; Proverbs 6:10, 11) Countless millions live in poverty because they are victimized by greedy men in power. (Compare James 2:6.) "Man has dominated man to his injury," says the Bible. (Ecclesiastes 8:9) No evidence exists for attributing all poverty to God or to fate.

### Belief in Fate—Its Damaging Effects

Still another persuasive argument against belief in fate is the effect fatalism can have upon believers. Said Jesus Christ: "Every good tree produces fine fruit, but every rotten tree produces worthless fruit." (Matthew 7:17) Let us consider one "fruit" of fatalism—the way it influences people's sense of responsibility.

A healthy sense of personal responsibility is important. It is one of the things that motivate parents to provide for their families, workers to perform their tasks conscientiously, manufacturers to provide a quality product. Belief in fate may numb that sense. Imagine, for example, that a man's car has a faulty steering mechanism. If he has a keen sense of responsibility, he gets it repaired out of concern for his own life and the lives of his passengers. A believer in fate, on the other hand, may ignore the risk, reasoning that a breakdown will occur only if it is 'God's will'!

Yes, belief in fate may easily promote carelessness, laziness, failure to accept responsibility for one's actions, and a host of other negative traits.

### A Barrier to Our

### Relationship With God?

Most harmful of all, belief in fate can suppress one's sense of responsibility, or obligation, toward God. (Ecclesiastes 12:13) The psalmist urges all mankind to "taste and see that Jehovah is good." (Psalm 34:8) God sets forth certain requirements for those who would enjoy his goodness.—Psalm 15:1-5.

One such requirement is repentance. (Acts 3:19; 17:30) That involves admitting our mistakes and making needed changes. As imperfect humans, all of us have much of which we need to repent. But if a person believes that he is a helpless victim of fate, it is difficult to feel a need to repent or to take responsibility for his errors.

Said the psalmist about God: "Your loving-kindness is better than life." (Psalm 63:3) Yet, belief in fate has convinced millions that God is the author of their misery. Naturally, this has embittered many toward him, shutting the door to their having a truly close relationship with the Creator. After all, how could you feel love for the one whom you viewed as causing all your problems and trials? Fatalism thus erects a barrier between God and man.

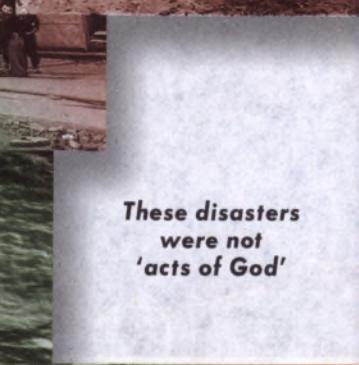
### Freed From the Tyranny of Fate

Young Ousmane, mentioned at the outset, was once enslaved by belief in fate. However, when Jehovah's Witnesses helped him to evaluate his thinking in the light of the Bible, Ousmane was moved to abandon his belief in fate. The results were a profound sense of relief and a new, positive outlook on life. More important, he has come to know Jehovah as a God who is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness and truth."—Exodus 34:6.

Ousmane has also come to realize that God, although not planning every detail of our lives, does have a purpose for the future.\* Says 2 Peter 3:13: "There are new heavens and a new earth that we are awaiting according to his promise, and in these righ-

\* For a thorough discussion of God's foreknowledge, see *The Watchtower*, July 15, 1984, pages 3-7.





UN PHOTO 186208 /M. Grafman

WHO

teousness is to dwell." Jehovah's Witnesses have helped millions to cultivate the hope of living forever as a part of this promised "new earth." They would like to help you too.

As you grow in accurate knowledge of the Bible, you will come to appreciate that your future does not depend upon some predetermined fate over which you have no control. The words of Moses to the ancient Is-

raelites well apply: "I have put life and death before you, the blessing and

the malediction; and you must choose life in order that you may keep alive, you and your offspring, by loving Jehovah your God, by listening to his voice and by sticking to him." (Deuteronomy 30:19, 20) Yes, you have a say in your future. It is not in the hands of fate.



## THE LAW BEFORE CHRIST

*"How I do love your law! All day long it is my concern."*—PSALM 119:97.

SINCE childhood, Job had likely gazed up at the stars in wonder. Probably, his parents had taught him names for the great constellations and what they knew about the laws that governed the movement of the constellations through the sky. After all, people in ancient times used the steady motions of these vast, elegant star-patterns to mark the changing seasons. But for all the times he gazed at them in awe, Job

did not know what mighty forces held these star formations together. Thus, he could scarcely begin to answer when Jehovah God asked him: "Have you grasped the celestial laws?" (Job 38:31-33, *The New Jerusalem Bible*) Yes, the stars are governed by laws—laws so precise and complex that today's scientists do not fully comprehend them.

<sup>2</sup> Jehovah is the Supreme Lawgiver in the universe. All his works are governed by law.

1. What governs the movements of the heavenly bodies?

2. Why may it be said that all creation is governed by law?

## **Job's parents probably taught him about the laws governing the constellations**

His beloved Son, "the firstborn of all creation," was faithfully obeying his Father's law before the physical universe existed! (Colossians 1:15) The angels too are directed by law. (Psalm 103:20) Even animals are governed by law as they obey the instinctive commands that their Creator has programmed into them.—Proverbs 30:24-28; Jeremiah 8:7.

<sup>3</sup> What about mankind? Although we are blessed with such gifts as intelligence, morality, and spirituality, we still need a measure of divine law to guide us in using these faculties. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were perfect, so that only a few laws were needed to guide them. Love for their heavenly Father should have given them ample reason to obey gladly. But they disobeyed. (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15-17; 3:6-19) As a result, their offspring were sinful creatures who needed many more laws to provide direction. Over time, Jehovah lovingly filled this need. He gave Noah specific laws that he was to pass on to his family. (Genesis 9:1-7) Centuries later, through Moses, God gave the new nation of Israel a detailed, written Law code. This was the first time that Jehovah governed an entire nation by divine law. Examining that Law will help us to understand the vital role that divine law plays in the lives of Christians today.

### **The Mosaic Law—Its Purpose**

<sup>4</sup> The apostle Paul, a deep student of the Law, asked: "Why, then, the Law?" (Galatians 3:19) To answer, we need to recall that Jehovah promised his friend Abraham that

3. (a) Why does mankind need laws? (b) By what means did Jehovah govern the nation of Israel?

4. Why would it be a challenge for the chosen descendants of Abraham to produce the promised Seed?

his family line would produce a Seed who would bring great blessings to all nations. (Genesis 22:18) But herein lay a challenge: Abraham's chosen descendants, the Israelites, were not all individuals who loved Jehovah. As time went on, most proved to be stiff-necked, rebellious—some were all but ungovernable! (Exodus 32:9; Deuteronomy 9:7) For such ones, being among God's people was simply a matter of birth, not of choice.

<sup>5</sup> How could such a people produce and be benefited by the promised Seed? Rather than controlling them like robots, Jehovah *taught* them by means of law. (Psalm 119:33-35; Isaiah 48:17) In fact, the Hebrew word for "law," *toh·rah'*, means "instruction." What did it teach? Primarily it taught the Israelites of their need for the Messiah, who would redeem them from their sinful state. (Galatians 3:24) The Law also taught godly fear and obedience. In harmony with the Abrahamic promise, the Israelites were to serve as witnesses of Jehovah to all other nations. So the Law had to teach them a lofty, noble code of conduct that would reflect well on Jehovah; it would help Israel to keep separate from the corrupt practices of the surrounding nations.—Leviticus 18:24, 25; Isaiah 43:10-12.

<sup>6</sup> Little wonder, then, that the Mosaic Law contains many statutes—over 600 of them.\* This written code regulated the

\* Of course, that is still a very small number in comparison with the legal systems of modern nations. For example, by the early 1990's, the federal laws of the United States filled over 125,000 pages, with thousands of new laws being added each year.

5. (a) What did Jehovah teach the Israelites by means of the Mosaic Law? (b) How was the Law designed to affect the conduct of its adherents?
6. (a) About how many statutes does the Mosaic Law contain, and why should that not be considered excessive? (See footnote.) (b) What insight may we gain through a study of the Mosaic Law?

## The Jewish Religious Leaders

**Scribes:** They saw themselves as Ezra's successors and as the explainers of the Law. According to the book *A History of the Jews*, "the scribes were not all lofty spirits, and their attempts to draw hidden meanings from the law often degenerated into meaningless formulas and stupid restrictions. These hardened into custom, which soon became an unrelenting tyrant."

**Hasidim:** The name means "pious ones" or "saints." First mentioned as a class around 200 B.C.E., they were politically powerful, fanatic defenders of the purity of the Law against the tyranny of Greek influence. The Hasidim split into three groups: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes.

**Pharisees:** Some scholars believe the name is derived from the words for "Separated Ones," or "Separatists." They were indeed fanatic in their drive to be separate from Gentiles, but they also saw their fraternity as separate from—and superior to—the common Jewish people, who were ignorant of the complexities of the oral law. One historian said of the Pharisees: "Viewed as a whole, they treated men like children, formal-

izing and defining the minutest particulars of ritual observances." Said another scholar: "Pharisaism produced a mass of legal rules covering all situations, with the inevitable consequence that they magnified trifles and in doing so trifled with magnitudes (Mt. 23:23)."

**Sadducees:** A group that was closely tied to the aristocracy and the priesthood. They vigorously opposed the scribes and the Pharisees, saying that the oral law did not have the validity of the written Law. That they lost this battle is demonstrated by the Mishnah itself: "Greater stringency applies to [the observance of] the words of the Scribes than to [the observance of] the words of the [written] Law." The Talmud, which included much commentary on the oral law, later went so far as to say: "The words of the scribes are . . . more dear than the words of Torah."

**Essenes:** A group of ascetics who isolated themselves in separated communities. According to *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, the Essenes were even more exclusive than the Pharisees and "at times could out-Pharisee the Pharisees themselves."

realms of worship, government, morals, justice, even diet and hygiene. Does that mean, though, that the Law was merely a mass of cold regulations and terse commands? Far from it! A study of this Law code offers a wealth of insight into Jehovah's loving personality. Consider some examples.

### A Law That Breathed Mercy and Compassion

<sup>7</sup> The Law emphasized mercy and compassion, especially for the lowly or the helpless. Widows and orphans were singled out for protection. (Exodus 22:22-24) Work animals were protected from cruelty. Basic

7, 8. (a) How did the Law emphasize mercy and compassion? (b) How did Jehovah enforce the Law mercifully in the case of David?

property rights were respected. (Deuteronomy 24:10; 25:4) While the Law demanded the death penalty for murder, it made mercy available in cases of accidental killing. (Numbers 35:11) Evidently, Israelite judges had leeway to decide on the penalty imposed for some offenses, depending on the attitude of the wrongdoer.—Compare Exodus 22:7 and Leviticus 6:1-7.

<sup>8</sup> Jehovah set the example for judges by applying the Law with firmness where necessary but with mercy wherever possible. King David, who had committed adultery and murder, was shown mercy. Not that he went unpunished, for Jehovah did not shield him from the terrible consequences stemming from his sin. Yet, because of the

Kingdom covenant and because David was a merciful man by nature and had a deeply repentant heart attitude, he was not put to death.—1 Samuel 24:4-7; 2 Samuel 7:16; Psalm 51:1-4; James 2:13.

<sup>9</sup> In addition, the Mosaic Law emphasized love. Imagine one of today's nations having a law code that actually required *love!* Thus, not only did the Mosaic Law prohibit murder; it commanded: "You must love your fellow as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18) Not only did it forbid the unjust treatment of the alien resident; it commanded: "You must love him as yourself, for you became alien residents in the land of Egypt." (Leviticus 19:34) Not only did it outlaw adultery; it commanded the husband to make his own wife rejoice! (Deuteronomy 24:5) In the book of Deuteronomy alone, Hebrew words signifying the quality of love are used some 20 times. Jehovah assured the Israelites of his own love—past, present, and future. (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:12-14) Really, the greatest command of the Mosaic Law was: "You must love Jehovah your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your vital force." (Deuteronomy 6:5) Jesus said that the whole Law hangs upon this command, along with the command to love one's neighbor. (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37-40) No wonder the psalmist wrote: "How I do love your law! All day long it is my concern."—Psalm 119:97.

### The Misuse of the Law

<sup>10</sup> How tragic, then, that Israel largely lacked appreciation for the Mosaic Law! The people disobeyed the Law, ignored it, or forgot about it. They polluted pure worship with the disgusting religious practices

9. What role did love play in the Mosaic Law?
10. How did the Jews, for the most part, treat the Mosaic Law?

of other nations. (2 Kings 17:16, 17; Psalm 106:13, 35-38) And they betrayed the Law in other ways as well.

<sup>11</sup> Some of the worst damage to the Law was done by the very ones who claimed to be teaching and preserving it. This happened after the days of the faithful scribe Ezra of the fifth century B.C.E. Ezra fought hard against the corrupting influences of other nations and stressed the reading and teaching of the Law. (Ezra 7:10; Nehemiah 8:5-8) Some teachers of the Law claimed to follow in Ezra's footsteps and formed what came to be termed the "Great Synagogue." Among its sayings was the directive: "Make a fence around the Law." These teachers reasoned that the Law was like a precious garden. In order that no one should trespass in this garden by transgressing its laws, they created further laws, the "Oral Law," to prevent the people from coming close to such error.

<sup>12</sup> Some might argue that Jewish leaders were justified in feeling this way. After Ezra's day the Jews were dominated by foreign powers, especially Greece. To combat the influence of Greek philosophy and culture, groups of religious leaders arose among the Jews. (See box, page 10.) In time some of these groups came to rival and even surpass the Levitical priesthood as teachers of the Law. (Compare Malachi 2:7.) By 200 B.C.E., the oral law was making its way into Jewish life. At first these laws were not to be written, lest they be taken as equal to the written Law. But gradually, human thinking was put ahead of the divine, so that eventually this "fence" actually damaged the very "garden" it was supposed to protect.

- 11, 12. (a) How did groups of religious leaders do damage after the days of Ezra? (See box.) (b) Why did the ancient rabbis feel it necessary to "make a fence around the Law"?

## The Pollution of Pharisaism

<sup>13</sup> The rabbis reasoned that since the Torah, or Mosaic Law, was perfect, it must contain an answer to every question that might arise. This notion was not truly reverent. In reality, it gave the rabbis license to use clever human reasoning, making it appear that God's Word was the basis for rules on all manner of issues—some personal, others simply trivial.

<sup>14</sup> Again and again the religious leaders took Scriptural precepts and stretched them to extremes. For instance, the Mosaic Law promoted separateness from the nations, but the rabbis preached a form of unreasoning contempt for everything non-Jewish. They taught that a Jew must not leave his cattle at a Gentile inn, for Gentiles "are suspected of bestiality." A Jewish woman was not allowed to aid a Gentile woman in labor because she would thereby "be assisting to bring to birth a child for idolatry." Since they were properly suspicious of Greek gymnasiums, the rabbis forbade all athletic exercises. History proves that all of this did little to protect the Jews from Gentile beliefs. In fact, the Pharisees themselves came to teach the pagan Greek doctrine of the immortality of the soul!—Ezekiel 18:4.

<sup>15</sup> The Pharisees also distorted the laws of purification. It was said that the Pharisees would purify the sun itself if given the chance. Their law held that a delay in "answering nature's call" would defile a man! Hand-washing became a complex ritual, with rules as to which hand should be

13. How did some Jewish religious leaders justify the making of many rules?
14. (a) How did the Jewish religious leaders stretch the Scriptural precept of separateness from the nations to an unscriptural extreme? (b) What shows that rabbinic rules failed to protect the Jewish people from pagan influences?
15. How did the Jewish religious leaders distort the laws on purification and incest?

washed first and how. Women were considered particularly impure. On the basis of the Scriptural command not to "come near" any fleshly relation (in reality a law against incest), the rabbis ruled that a husband was not to walk behind his wife; nor should he converse with her in the marketplace.—Leviticus 18:6.

<sup>16</sup> Especially notorious is the spiritual travesty that the oral law made of the Sabbath law. God gave Israel a simple command: Do not do any work on the seventh day of the week. (Exodus 20:8-11) However, the oral law went on to define some 39 different *types* of forbidden work, including tying or loosening a knot, sewing two stitches, writing down two Hebrew letters, and so on. Then each of these types required endless further rules. Which knots were forbidden and which allowed? The oral law answered with arbitrary regulations. Healing came to be seen as a forbidden work. For example, it was forbidden to set a broken limb on the Sabbath. A man with a toothache could use vinegar to season his food, but he must not suck the vinegar through his teeth. That might heal his tooth!

<sup>17</sup> Thus buried under hundreds of man-made rules, the Sabbath law lost its spiritual meaning as far as most Jews were concerned. When Jesus Christ, the "Lord of the sabbath," performed spectacular, heartwarming miracles on the Sabbath, the scribes and the Pharisees were unmoved. They cared only that he seemed to ignore their regulations.—Matthew 12:8, 10-14.

## Learning From the Folly of the Pharisees

<sup>18</sup> In sum, we might say that these added

- 16, 17. How did the oral law expand on the command to observe a weekly Sabbath, and with what result?
18. What was the effect of adding oral laws and traditions to the Mosaic Law? Illustrate.

laws and traditions became affixed to the Mosaic Law much as barnacles become attached to the hull of a ship. A shipowner goes to great lengths to scrape these pesky creatures from his ship because they slow the vessel and destroy its rustproof paint. Likewise, the oral laws and traditions encumbered the Law and exposed it to corrosive misuse. However, instead of scraping such extraneous laws away, the rabbis kept adding more. By the time the Messiah came to fulfill the Law, the “ship” was so encrusted with “barnacles” that it was barely afloat! (Compare Proverbs 16:25.) Rather than protecting the Law covenant, these religious leaders committed the folly of betraying it. Why, though, did their “fence” of rules fail?

<sup>19</sup> The leaders of Judaism failed to understand that the battle against corruption is fought in the heart and not on the pages of lawbooks. (Jeremiah 4:14) The key to victory is love—love for Jehovah, his law, and his righteous principles. Such love produces a corresponding hatred of what Jehovah hates. (Psalm 97:10; 119:104) Those whose hearts are thus filled with love remain faithful to Jehovah’s laws in this corrupt world. The Jewish religious leaders had the great privilege of teaching the people so as to promote and inspire such love. Why did they fail to do so? Evidently they lacked faith. (Matthew 23:23, footnote) If they had had faith in the power of Jehovah’s spirit to work in the hearts of faithful humans, they would not have felt a need to take rigid control of the lives of others. (Isaiah 59:1; Ezekiel 34:4) Lacking faith, they did not impart faith; they burdened the people with man-made commandments.

—Matthew 15:3, 9; 23:4.

19. (a) Why did the “fence around the Law” fail? (b) What shows that the Jewish religious leaders lacked genuine faith?

<sup>20</sup> Those Jewish leaders did not promote love. Their traditions produced a religion obsessed with externals, with mechanical obedience for the sake of appearances—a fertile breeding ground for hypocrisy. (Matthew 23:25-28) Their regulations produced countless reasons for judging others. Thus the proud, authoritarian Pharisees felt justified in criticizing Jesus Christ himself. They lost sight of the main purpose of the Law and rejected the one true Messiah. In turn, he had to tell the Jewish nation: “Look! Your house is abandoned to you.” —Matthew 23:38; Galatians 3:23, 24.

<sup>21</sup> What is the lesson for us? Clearly, a rigid, tradition-oriented frame of mind does not promote the pure worship of Jehovah! But does this mean that worshipers of Jehovah today are not to have any rules at all unless these are specifically spelled out in Holy Scripture? No. For a complete answer, let us next consider how Jesus Christ replaced the Mosaic Law with a new and better law.

20, 21. (a) What overall effect did a tradition-oriented frame of mind have on Judaism? (b) What lesson do we learn from what happened to Judaism?

### Can You Explain?

- How is all creation governed by divine law?
- What was the main purpose of the Mosaic Law?
- What shows that the Mosaic Law emphasized mercy and compassion?
- Why did the Jewish religious leaders add countless rules to the Mosaic Law, and with what result?

# THE LAW OF THE CHRIST

*"I am . . . under law toward Christ."*—1 CORINTHIANS 9:21.

**P**EOPLES and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it." So said a 19th-century German philosopher. Indeed, the course of human history has been described as a "march of folly," a series of ghastly blunders and crises, many of which could have been prevented if mankind had only been willing to learn from past mistakes.

<sup>2</sup> The same refusal to learn from past mistakes figures in this discussion of divine law. Jehovah God replaced the Mosaic Law with an even better one—the law of the Christ. Yet, the leaders of Christendom, who claim to teach and live by this law, have failed to learn from the terrible folly of the Pharisees. So Christendom has twisted and abused the law of the Christ just as Judaism did the Law of Moses. How could that be? First, let us discuss this law itself—what it is, whom it governs and how, and what differentiates it from the Mosaic Law. Then we will examine how Christendom has abused it. May we thus learn from history and benefit from it!

## The New Covenant

<sup>3</sup> Who but Jehovah God could improve upon a perfect Law? The Mosaic Law covenant was perfect. (Psalm 19:7) In spite of that, Jehovah promised: "Look! There are

1, 2. (a) How might many of mankind's mistakes have been prevented? (b) What did Christendom fail to learn from the history of Judaism?

3. What promise did Jehovah make regarding a new covenant?

days coming, . . . and I will conclude with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah a new covenant; not one like the covenant that I concluded with their forefathers." The Ten Commandments—the nucleus of the Mosaic Law—were written on stone tablets. But of the new covenant, Jehovah said: "I will put my law within them, and in their heart I shall write it."—Jeremiah 31:31-34.

<sup>4</sup> Who would be taken into this new covenant? Certainly not the literal "house of Israel," who rejected the Mediator of this covenant. (Hebrews 9:15) No, this new "Israel" would be the "Israel of God," a nation of spiritual Israelites. (Galatians 6:16; Romans 2:28, 29) This small, spirit-anointed group of Christians would later be joined by "a great crowd" from all nations who would also seek to worship Jehovah. (Revelation 7:9, 10; Zechariah 8:23) While not party to the new covenant, these too would be bound by law. (Compare Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 15:15.) As "one flock" under "one shepherd," all would be "under law toward Christ," as the apostle Paul wrote. (John 10:16; 1 Corinthians 9:21) Paul called this new covenant a "better covenant." Why? For one thing, it is based on promises fulfilled rather than on shadows of things to come.—Hebrews 8:6; 9:11-14.

<sup>5</sup> What is the purpose of this covenant?

4. (a) Which Israel is involved in the new covenant? (b) Who else besides spiritual Israelites are under the law of the Christ?

5. What is the purpose of the new covenant, and why will it succeed?

It is to produce a nation of kings and priests to bless all mankind. (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:10) The Mosaic Law covenant never produced this nation in the fullest sense, for Israel as a whole rebelled and lost out on their opportunity. (Compare Romans 11:17-21.) The new covenant, however, is certain to succeed, for it is associated with a very different type of law. Different in what ways?

### The Law Belonging to Freedom

<sup>6</sup> The law of the Christ is repeatedly associated with freedom. (John 8:31, 32) It is referred to as “the law of a free people” and “the perfect law that belongs to freedom.” (James 1:25; 2:12) Of course, all freedom among humans is relative. Still, this law offers far greater freedom than its predecessor, the Mosaic Law. How so?

<sup>7</sup> For one thing, no one is born under the law of the Christ. Such factors as race and place of birth are irrelevant. True Christians freely choose in their hearts to accept the yoke of obedience to this law. In so doing, they find that it is a kindly yoke, a light load. (Matthew 11:28-30) After all, the Mosaic Law was also designed to teach man that he is sinful and in dire need of a ransom sacrifice to redeem him. (Galatians 3:19) The law of the Christ teaches that the Messiah has come, paid the ransom price with his life, and opened the way for us to be freed from the terrible oppression of sin and death! (Romans 5:20, 21) In order to benefit, we need to ‘exercise faith’ in that sacrifice.—John 3:16.

<sup>8</sup> “Exercising faith” involves living by the law of the Christ. That includes obeying all

6, 7. How does the law of the Christ offer greater freedom than did the Mosaic Law?

8. What does the law of the Christ include, but why does living by it not require the memorizing of hundreds of legal statutes?

of Christ’s commands. Does this mean committing to memory hundreds of laws and statutes? No. While Moses, the mediator of the old covenant, wrote down the Mosaic Law, Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, never wrote down a single law. Instead, he *lived* this law. By means of his perfect life course, he laid down a pattern for all to follow. (1 Peter 2:21) Perhaps that is why the early Christians’ worship was referred to as “The Way.” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:22) To them, the law of the Christ was exemplified in the life of the Christ. To imitate Jesus was to obey this law. Their intense love of him meant that this law was indeed written on their hearts, as prophesied. (Jeremiah 31:33; 1 Peter 4:8) And one who is obedient because of love never feels oppressed—another reason why the law of the Christ may be called “the law of a free people.”

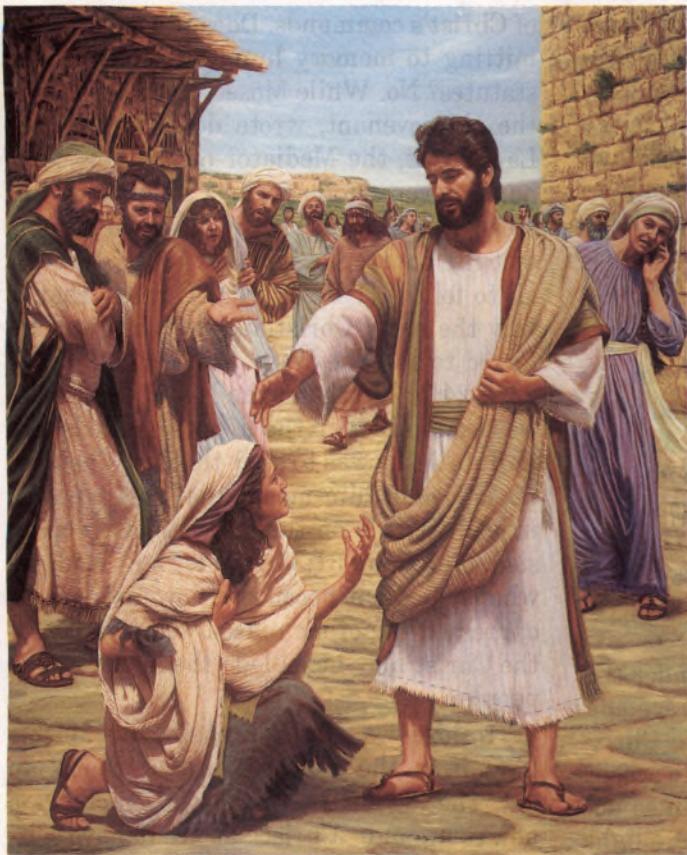
<sup>9</sup> If love was important in the Mosaic Law, it is the very essence of Christian law. The law of the Christ thus includes a new command—Christians are to have self-sacrificing love for one another. They are to love as Jesus did; he willingly laid down his life in behalf of his friends. (John 13:34, 35; 15:13) So it might be said that the law of the Christ is an even loftier expression of theocracy than the Law of Moses was. As this journal has previously pointed out: “Theocracy is rule by God; God is love; therefore theocracy is rule by love.”

### Jesus and the Pharisees

<sup>10</sup> It is hardly surprising, then, that Jesus came into conflict with the Jewish

9. What is the very essence of the law of the Christ, and in what way does this law involve a new command?

10. How did Jesus’ teaching contrast with that of the Pharisees?



**Jesus applied the Mosaic Law reasonably and mercifully**

<sup>11</sup> Rather than adding more regulations to the Mosaic Law, Jesus showed how the Jews should have been applying that Law all along—with reasonableness and mercy. Recall, for example, the occasion when he was approached by a woman afflicted with a flow of blood. According to the Mosaic Law, anyone she touched would become unclean, so she was certainly not supposed to mix with a crowd of people! (Leviticus 15:25-27) But she was so desperate to be healed that she made her way through the crowd and touched Jesus' outer garment. The bleeding stopped immediately. Did he rebuke her for violating the Law? No; instead, he understood her desperate circumstance and demonstrated the Law's greatest precept—love. Empathetically he told her: "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be in good health from your grievous sickness."—Mark 5:25-34.

religious leaders of his day. A "perfect law that belongs to freedom" was as far from the minds of the scribes and the Pharisees as anything could be. They tried to control the people through man-made regulations. Their teaching became oppressive, condemnatory, negative. In stark contrast, Jesus' teaching was overwhelmingly upbuilding and positive! He was practical and addressed the real needs and concerns of the people. He taught simply and with genuine feeling, using illustrations from everyday life and drawing from the authority of God's Word. Thus, "the crowds were astounded at his way of teaching." (Matthew 7:28) Yes, Jesus' teaching reached their hearts!

**Is the Law of the Christ Permissive?**

<sup>12</sup> Should we conclude, then, that because the law of the Christ "belongs to freedom," it is permissive, whereas the Pharisees, with all their oral traditions, at least kept the conduct of people within strict

11. How did Jesus demonstrate that the Mosaic Law should have been applied with reasonableness and mercy?

12. (a) Why should we not assume that Christ is permissive? (b) What shows that the creating of many laws leads to the creating of many loopholes?

bounds? No. Legal systems today illustrate that often the more laws there are, the more loopholes people find in them.\* In Jesus' day the multiplicity of Pharisaic rules encouraged the seeking of loopholes, the perfunctory performance of works devoid of love, and the cultivating of a self-righteous exterior to mask inner corruption.—Matthew 23:23, 24.

<sup>13</sup> The law of the Christ, by contrast, does not nurture such attitudes. In fact, obeying a law that is based on love of Jehovah and that is obeyed by imitating Christ's self-sacrificing love for others results in a far higher standard of conduct than does following a formal legal code. Love does not seek loopholes; it keeps us from doing harmful things that a law code might not explicitly prohibit. (See Matthew 5:27, 28.) Thus, the law of the Christ will move us to do things for others—to show generosity, hospitality, and love—in ways that no formal law could make us do.—Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 9:7; Hebrews 13:16.

<sup>14</sup> To the extent that its members lived by the law of the Christ, the early Christian congregation enjoyed a warm, loving atmosphere, relatively free from the rigid, judg-

\* The Pharisees were largely responsible for the form of Judaism that exists today, so it is not surprising that Judaism still seeks loopholes in its many added Sabbath restrictions. For example, a visitor to an orthodox Jewish hospital on the Sabbath may find that the elevator automatically stops on every floor so that the passengers can avoid doing the sinful "work" of pushing an elevator button. Some orthodox doctors write out prescriptions in ink that will vanish in a few days. Why? The Mishnah classifies writing as "work," but it defines "writing" as leaving a *lasting* mark.

13. Why does the law of the Christ result in a higher standard of conduct than any written code of laws?

14. What effect did living by the law of the Christ have on the first-century Christian congregation?

mental, and hypocritical attitudes so prevalent in the synagogues of the day. Members of these fledgling congregations must truly have sensed that they were living by "the law of a free people"!

<sup>15</sup> However, Satan was eager to corrupt the Christian congregation from within, just as he had corrupted the nation of Israel. The apostle Paul warned of wolflike men who would "speak twisted things" and oppress the flock of God. (Acts 20:29, 30) He had to contend with Judaizers, who sought to trade in the relative freedom of the law of the Christ for enslavement to the Mosaic Law, which had been fulfilled in Christ. (Matthew 5:17; Acts 15:1; Romans 10:4) After the last of the apostles died, there was no more restraint against such apostasy. So corruption became rampant.—2 Thessalonians 2:6, 7.

#### Christendom Pollutes the Law of the Christ

<sup>16</sup> As with Judaism, corruption took more than one form in Christendom. She too fell prey to false doctrines and loose morals. And her efforts to protect her flock against outside influences often proved corrosive to any remaining shreds of pure worship. Rigid and unscriptural laws proliferated.

<sup>17</sup> The Catholic Church has been foremost in creating vast bodies of church law. These laws were particularly warped on matters pertaining to sex. According to the book *Sexuality and Catholicism*, the church absorbed the Greek philosophy of Stoicism, which was suspicious of all forms of pleasure. The church came to teach that all sexual pleasure, including that of

15. What were some of Satan's early efforts to corrupt the Christian congregation?

16, 17. (a) What forms did corruption take in Christendom? (b) How did the laws of the Catholic Church promote a twisted view of sex?

normal marital relations, was sinful. (Contrast Proverbs 5:18, 19.) Sex was claimed to be for procreation, nothing else. Thus church law condemned any form of contraception as a very serious sin, sometimes requiring many years of penance. Further, the priesthood was forbidden to marry, an edict that has given rise to much illicit sex, including the abusing of children.—1 Timothy 4:1-3.

<sup>18</sup> As church laws multiplied, they were organized into books. These began to obscure and supersede the Bible. (Compare Matthew 15:3, 9.) Like Judaism, Catholicism distrusted secular writing and deemed much of it a threat. This view soon went far beyond the Bible's sensible caution on the matter. (Ecclesiastes 12:12; Colossians 2:8) Jerome, a church writer of the fourth century C.E., exclaimed: "O Lord, if ever again I possess worldly books or read them, I have denied thee." In time, the church took to censoring books—even those on secular subjects. Thus 17th-century astronomer Galileo was censured for writing that the earth orbits the sun. The church's insistence on being the final authority on

18. What resulted from the multiplication of church laws?

### How Would You Answer?

- What is the very essence of the law of the Christ?
- How did Jesus' style of teaching differ from that of the Pharisees?
- How did Satan use a rigid, rule-making spirit to corrupt Christendom?
- What are some positive effects of living by the law of the Christ?

everything—even on questions of astronomy—in the long run would work to undermine faith in the Bible.

<sup>19</sup> The church's rule-making flourished in monasteries, where monks separated themselves from this world to live in self-denial. Most Catholic monasteries adhered to "The Rule of St. Benedict." The abbot (a term derived from the Aramaic word for "father") ruled with absolute authority. (Compare Matthew 23:9.) If a monk received a gift from his parents, the abbot would decide whether that monk or some other should receive it. Besides condemning vulgarities, one rule forbade all small talk and jokes, saying: "No disciple shall speak such things."

<sup>20</sup> Protestantism, which sought to reform the unscriptural excesses of Catholicism, soon became equally adept at making authoritarian rules with no basis in the law of the Christ. For instance, the leading reformer John Calvin came to be termed "the legislator of the renovated Church." He governed Geneva with a multitude of stern rules enforced by "Elders" whose "office," Calvin noted, "is to have oversight of the life of everyone." (Contrast 2 Corinthians 1:24.) The church controlled the inns and regulated which topics of conversation were allowable. There were stiff penalties for such offenses as singing flippant songs or dancing.\*

### Learning From the Errors of Christendom

<sup>21</sup> Have all these rules and laws worked

\* Servetus, who disputed some of Calvin's theological views, was burned at the stake as a heretic.

19. How did the monasteries promote rigid authoritarianism?
20. What shows that Protestantism also proved adept at unscriptural authoritarianism?
21. What have been the overall effects of Christendom's tendency to 'go beyond the things written'?

to protect Christendom from corruption? Quite the contrary! Today Christendom has splintered into hundreds of sects, ranging from the exceedingly strict to the grossly permissive. All of them have, in one way or another, 'gone beyond the things written,' allowing human thinking to govern the flock and interfere with divine law.—1 Corinthians 4:6.

<sup>22</sup> However, the history of the law of the Christ is no tragedy. Jehovah God will nev-

22. Why has Christendom's defection not meant the end of the law of the Christ?

er allow mere humans to wipe out divine law. Christian law is very much in force today among true Christians, and these have the great privilege of living by it. But after examining what Judaism and Christendom have done with divine law, we might well wonder, 'How do we live by the law of the Christ while avoiding the trap of polluting God's Word with human reasoning and rules that undermine the very spirit of divine law? What balanced view should the law of the Christ instill in us today?' The following article will address these questions.

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## LIVING BY THE LAW OF THE CHRIST

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*"Go on carrying the burdens of one another, and thus fulfill the law of the Christ."* —GALATIANS 6:2.

**I**N Rwanda, Hutu and Tutsi Witnesses of Jehovah risked their lives to protect one another from the ethnic slaughter that recently swept that land. Jehovah's Witnesses in Kobe, Japan, who lost family members in the devastating earthquake were shattered by their loss. Yet, they moved promptly to rescue other victims. Yes, heartwarming examples from around the world demonstrate that the law of the Christ is at work today. It is a tremendous force for good.

<sup>2</sup> At the same time, a Bible prophecy

1. Why might it be said that the law of the Christ is a tremendous force for good today?
2. How has Christendom missed the point of the law of the Christ, and how do we go about fulfilling that law?

about these critical "last days" is being fulfilled. Many have "a form of godly devotion" but 'prove false to its power.' (2 Timothy 3:1, 5) Especially in Christendom, religion is often a matter of form, not of the heart. Is that because it is too difficult to live by the law of the Christ? No. Jesus would not give us a law that could not be followed. Christendom has simply missed the point of that law. She has failed to heed these inspired words: "Go on carrying the burdens of one another, and thus fulfill the law of the Christ." (Galatians 6:2) We "fulfill the law of the Christ" by carrying one another's burdens, not by imitating the Pharisees and unjustifiably adding to our brothers' loads.

<sup>3</sup> The law of the Christ includes all of Christ Jesus' commands—whether preaching and teaching, keeping the eye pure and simple, working at keeping peace with our neighbor, or removing uncleanness from the congregation. (Matthew 5: 27-30; 18:15-17; 28:19, 20; Revelation 2:14-16) Indeed, Christians are obligated to observe all commands in the Bible that are directed to followers of Christ. And there is more. Jehovah's organization, as well as individual congregations, has to establish necessary rules and procedures in order to preserve good order. (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40) Why, Christians could not even meet together if they had no rules as to when, where, and how to hold such meetings! (Hebrews 10:24, 25) Cooperating with reasonable guidelines laid down by those given authority in the organization is also a part of fulfilling the law of the Christ.—Hebrews 13:17.

<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, true Christians do not allow their worship to become a meaningless structure of laws. They do not serve Jehovah merely because some individual or organization tells them to do so. Rather, the driving force behind their worship is love. Paul wrote: "The love of the Christ *compels* us." (2 Corinthians 5:14, footnote) Jesus commanded his followers to love one another. (John 15:12, 13) Self-sacrificing love is the basis of the law of the Christ, and it compels or motivates true Christians everywhere, both in the family and in the congregation. Let us see how.

3. (a) What are some commands that are included in the law of the Christ? (b) Why would it be wrong to conclude that the Christian congregation should have no rules other than the direct commands of Christ?

4. What is the driving force behind pure worship?

## In the Family

<sup>5</sup> The apostle Paul wrote: "Husbands, continue loving your wives, just as the Christ also loved the congregation and delivered up himself for it." (Ephesians 5: 25) When a husband imitates Christ and treats his wife with love and understanding, he fulfills a vital aspect of the law of the Christ. Moreover, Jesus openly showed affection for young children, taking them into his arms, laying his hands upon them, and blessing them. (Mark 10:16) Parents who fulfill the law of the Christ also show affection for their children. True, there are parents who find it a challenge to imitate Jesus' example in this regard. Some are not demonstrative by nature. Parents, do not let such considerations keep you from showing your children the love you feel for them! It is not enough for *you* to know that you love your children. *They* must know it too. And they will not know it unless you find ways to show your love.—Compare Mark 1:11.

<sup>6</sup> At the same time, children need boundaries, which means that their parents need to set rules and sometimes enforce these rules by discipline. (Hebrews 12:7, 9, 11) Even so, children must be helped progressively to see the underlying reason for these rules: their parents love them. And they must learn that love is the best reason for them to obey their parents. (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20; 1 John 5:3) A discerning parent's goal is to teach

5. (a) How can parents fulfill the law of the Christ in the home? (b) What do children need from their parents, and what obstacles must some parents overcome in order to supply it?
6. (a) Do children need parental rules, and why do you so answer? (b) What underlying reason for household rules do children need to grasp? (c) What dangers are avoided when the law of the Christ prevails in the household?

young ones to use their "power of reason" so that eventually they will make good decisions on their own. (Romans 12:1; compare 1 Corinthians 13:11.) On the other hand, rules should not be too numerous or discipline too harsh. Paul says: "You fathers, do not be exasperating your children, so that they do not become downhearted." (Colossians 3:21; Ephesians 6:4) When the law of the Christ prevails in the household, there is no place for discipline administered with uncontrolled anger or for hurtful sarcasm. In such a home, children feel safe and upbuilt, not burdened or torn down.—Compare Psalm 36:7.

<sup>7</sup> Some who have visited Bethel homes around the world say that such are good examples of balance in the matter of rules for a family. Though composed of adults, such institutions function much like families.\* Bethel operations are complex and require a fair number of rules—certainly more than the average family. Nevertheless, the elders taking the lead in Bethel homes, offices, and factory operations endeavor to apply the law of the Christ. They view it as their assignment not only to organize the work but also to promote spiritual progress and "the joy of Jehovah" among their fellow workers. (Nehemiah 8:10) Therefore, they endeavor to do things in a positive and encouraging way and strive to be reasonable. (Ephesians 4:31, 32) No wonder Bethel families are known for their joyful spirit!

\* Such homes are not like Christendom's monasteries. There are no "abbots," or "fathers," in that sense. (Matthew 23:9) Responsible brothers are accorded respect, but their service is guided by the same principles that govern all elders.

7. In what ways might Bethel homes provide an example when it comes to setting rules in the home?

## In the Congregation

<sup>8</sup> In the congregation it is likewise our goal to build one another up in the spirit of love. (1 Thessalonians 5:11) So all Christians should be careful not to add to the burdens of others by taking it upon themselves to impose their own ideas in matters of personal choice. At times, some write to the Watch Tower Society asking for rulings on such matters as what view they should have of specific films, books, and even toys. Yet, the Society is not authorized to scrutinize such things and to issue judgments on them. In most cases, these are matters that each individual or family head should decide, based on his love of Bible principles. Others tend to turn the Society's suggestions and guidelines into rules. For example, in the March 15, 1996, issue of *The Watchtower*, there was a fine article encouraging elders to make regular shepherding calls on congregation members. Was the purpose to establish rules? No. Although those who are able to follow the suggestions find many benefits, some elders are not in a position to do so. Similarly, the article "Questions From Readers" in the April 1, 1995, issue of *The Watchtower* cautioned against detracting from the dignity of the occasion of baptism by going to extremes, such as wild partying or staging victory parades. Some have carried this mature counsel to extremes, even making a rule that sending an encouraging card on this occasion would be wrong!

<sup>9</sup> Consider, too, that if "the perfect law that belongs to freedom" is to prevail in our midst, we must accept that not all

8. (a) What should always be our goal in the congregation? (b) Under what circumstances have some asked for or tried to make rules?
9. Why is it important that we avoid being overly critical and judgmental of one another?

Christian consciences are identical. (James 1:25) Should we make an issue if people have individual choices that do not violate Scriptural principles? No. Our doing so would be divisive. (1 Corinthians 1:10) Paul, when warning us against passing judgment on a fellow Christian, said: "To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for Jehovah can make him stand." (Romans 14:4) We risk displeasing God if we speak against one another over matters that should be left to the individual conscience.—James 4:10-12.

<sup>10</sup> Let us remember, too, that the elders are assigned to keep watch over the flock of God. (Acts 20:28) They are there to help. We should feel free to approach them for advice, for they are students of the Bible and are familiar with what has been discussed in the literature of the Watch Tower Society. When the elders see conduct that will likely lead to a violation of Scriptural principles, they fearlessly offer needed counsel. (Galatians 6:1) Congregation members follow the law of the Christ by cooperating with these dear shepherds, who take the lead in their midst.—Hebrews 13:7.

### Elders Apply the Law of the Christ

<sup>11</sup> Elders are eager to fulfill the law of the Christ in the congregation. They take the lead in preaching the good news, teach from the Bible so as to reach hearts and, as loving, gentle shepherds, speak to "depressed souls." (1 Thessalonians 5:14) They avoid the unchristian attitudes that exist in so many of Christendom's religions.

10. Who are assigned to watch over the congregation, and how should we support them?
11. How do elders apply the law of the Christ in the congregation?

True, this world is degenerating rapidly, and like Paul, elders may feel anxiety for the flock; but they maintain balance as they act on such concerns.—2 Corinthians 11:28.

<sup>12</sup> For example, a Christian may wish to consult with an elder about an important matter that is not covered by some direct Scriptural reference or that calls for balancing different Christian principles. Perhaps he has been offered a promotion at work that has a larger salary but greater responsibility. Or the unbelieving father of a young Christian may be making demands on his son that could affect his ministry. In such situations the elder refrains from giving a personal opinion. Rather, he will likely open the Bible and help the individual to reason on the relevant principles. He may use the *Watch Tower Publications Index*, if available, to locate what "the faithful and discreet slave" has said on the subject in the pages of *The Watchtower* and other publications. (Matthew 24:45) What if the Christian thereafter makes a decision that does not seem wise to the elder? If the decision does not directly transgress Bible principles or laws, the Christian will find that the elder recognizes the individual's right to make such a decision, knowing that "each one will carry his own load." The Christian should remember, however, that "whatever a man is sowing, this he will also reap."—Galatians 6:5, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Why does the experienced elder act in this way? For at least two reasons. First, Paul told one congregation that he was not 'the master over their faith.' (2 Corinthi-

12. When a Christian approaches an elder for help, how might the elder respond?
13. Rather than giving direct answers to questions or giving their own opinions, why do elders help others to reason on matters?



## Your child has a great need for love

<sup>14</sup> We can have faith that Jehovah God by means of his holy spirit will influence the hearts of true worshippers. Thus, mature Christians appeal to the hearts of their brothers, entreating them, as did the apostle Paul. (2 Corinthians 8:8; 10:1; Philemon 8, 9) Paul knew that it is mainly the unrighteous, not the righteous, who need detailed laws to keep them in line. (1 Timothy 1:9) He expressed, not suspicion or distrust, but faith in

ans 1:24) The elder, in helping his brother to reason on the Scriptures and make his own informed decision, is imitating Paul's attitude. He recognizes that there are limits to his authority, just as Jesus recognized that there were limits to *his* authority. (Luke 12:13, 14; Jude 9) At the same time, elders readily offer helpful, even strong, Scriptural counsel where needed. Second, he is training his fellow Christian. The apostle Paul said: "Solid food belongs to mature people, to those who through use have their perceptive powers trained to distinguish both right and wrong." (Hebrews 5:14) Hence, to grow to maturity, we have to use our own perceptive powers, not always relying on someone else to give us the answers. The elder, by showing his fellow Christian how to reason on the Scriptures, is in this way helping him to progress.

his brothers. To one congregation he wrote: "We have confidence in the Lord regarding you." (2 Thessalonians 3:4) Paul's faith, trust, and confidence surely did much to motivate those Christians. Elders and traveling overseers today have similar aims. How refreshing these faithful men are, as they lovingly shepherd the flock of God! —Isaiah 32:1, 2; 1 Peter 5:1-3.

### Living by the Law of the Christ

<sup>15</sup> All of us need to examine ourselves regularly to see whether we are living by and promoting the law of the Christ. (2 Corinthians 13:5) Really, all of us can benefit by asking: 'Am I upbuilding or critical?

14. How can mature ones show that they trust in Jehovah?

15. What are some questions we can ask ourselves to see whether we are applying the law of the Christ in our relationship with our brothers?



**How refreshing our loving shepherds are!**

Am I balanced or extreme? Do I show consideration for others or insist on my own rights? A Christian does not try to dictate what steps his brother should or should not take in matters that are not specifically covered in the Bible.—Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 4:6.

<sup>16</sup> In these critical times, it is important for us to seek ways to encourage one another. (Hebrews 10:24, 25; compare Matthew 7:1-5.) When we look at our brothers and sisters, do not their good qualities mean much more to us than their weaknesses? To Jehovah, each one is precious. Unhappily, not all feel that way, even about themselves. Many tend to see only their own personal flaws and imperfections. To encourage such ones—and others—could we try to talk to one or two people at each meeting, letting them know why we value their presence and the important contribution they make in the congregation? What a joy to ease their burden in this way and

16. How can we help those with negative views of themselves, thus fulfilling a vital aspect of the law of the Christ?

thereby fulfill the law of the Christ!—Galatians 6:2.

### The Law of the Christ Is At Work!

<sup>17</sup> The law of the Christ is at work in the Christian congregation. We see it daily—when fellow Witnesses eagerly share the good news, when they comfort and encourage one another, when they struggle to serve Jehovah despite the most difficult problems, when parents strive to raise their children to love Jehovah with joyous hearts, when overseers teach God's Word with love and warmth, inciting the flock to have a burning zeal to serve Jehovah forever. (Matthew 28:19, 20; 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14) When we as individuals put the law of the Christ to work in our own lives, how Jehovah's heart rejoices! (Proverbs 23:15) He wants all those who love his perfect law to live forever. In the coming Paradise, we will see a time when mankind is perfect, a time without lawbreakers, and a time when every inclination of our hearts will be under control. What a glorious reward for living by the law of the Christ!

17. In what different ways do you see the law of the Christ at work in your congregation?

### What Do You Think?

- Why has Christendom missed the point of the law of the Christ?
- How may we put the law of the Christ to work in the family?
- To apply the law of the Christ in the congregation, what must we avoid, and what must we do?
- How may elders obey the law of the Christ in their dealings with the congregation?

# SERVING THE TRUSTWORTHY GOD

As told by Kimon Progakis



It was a bitterly cold evening in 1955. My wife, Giannoula, and I began to worry because our 18-year-old son, George, failed to return from the kiosk where he worked. Unexpectedly, a policeman knocked on our door. "Your son was hit while riding home on his bicycle," he said, "and he is dead." Then he leaned forward and whispered: "They will tell you it was an accident, but believe me, he was murdered." The local priest and some paramilitary leaders had conspired to kill him.

**I**N THOSE years, when Greece was recovering from times of strife and hardship, it was dangerous to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses. I knew firsthand about the power of the Greek Orthodox Church and the paramilitary organizations because for more than 15 years, I had been an active member of them. Let me tell you about events that led up to this tragedy in our family over 40 years ago.

## Growing Up in Greece

I was born in 1902 into a well-to-do family in a small village near the town of Chalcis, in Greece. My father was active in local politics, and our family were devout members of the Greek Orthodox Church. I became an avid reader of political and religious books at a time when the majority of my countrymen were illiterate.

The poverty and injustice prevalent at the beginning of the 20th century created in me a desire for a world with better conditions. Religion, I thought, should be able to improve the sad situation of my countrymen. Because of my religious inclination, leading men of my village proposed that I become the Greek Orthodox priest of our community. However, although I had visited many monasteries and had long discussions with bishops and abbots, I did not feel ready or willing to accept such a responsibility.

## In the Midst of Civil War

Years later, in April 1941, Greece came under Nazi occupation. This began a miserable period of killings, famine, deprivation, and untold human suffering. A strong resistance movement developed, and I joined



A recent photograph of Kimon with his wife, Giannoula

one of the guerrilla groups that fought the Nazi invaders. As a result, my home was set afire several times, I was shot, and my crops were destroyed. Early in 1943 my family and I had no other choice but to flee to the rugged mountains. We remained there until the end of the German occupation in October 1944.

Internal political and civil strife erupted after the Germans left. The guerrilla resistance group that I belonged to became one of the major fighting forces in the civil war. Although Communistic ideals of justice, equality, and comradeship appealed to me, the reality eventually left me totally disillusioned. Since I had a high position in the group, I saw firsthand that power tends to corrupt people. Despite apparently noble theories and ideals, selfishness and imperfection spoil the best of political intentions.

What especially shocked me was that on various sides of the civil conflict, Orthodox clergymen were taking up arms to kill ones of their own religion! I thought to myself,

'How can these clergymen say that they represent Jesus Christ, who warned: "All those who take the sword will perish by the sword"?' —Matthew 26:52.

During the civil war, in 1946, I was in hiding near the town of Lamia, in central Greece. My clothes were completely worn out, so I decided to disguise myself and go to a tailor in the city to have some new ones made. There was a heated debate going on when I arrived, and soon I found myself speaking, not about politics, but about my old love, religion.

Noting my informed viewpoints, onlookers suggested that I speak with a certain 'professor of theology.' Immediately, they went to get him.

#### Finding a Reliable Hope

In the discussion that followed, the "professor" asked me what was the basis of my beliefs. "The Holy Fathers and the Ecumenical Synods," I replied. Instead of contradicting me, he opened his small Bible to Matthew 23:9, 10, and asked me to read Jesus' words: "Moreover, do not call anyone your father on earth, for one is your Father, the heavenly One. Neither be called 'leaders,' for your Leader is one, the Christ."

That was an eye-opener for me! I sensed that this man was telling the truth. When he identified himself as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, I asked him for some literature to read. He brought me the book *Light*, which is a commentary on the Bible book of Revelation, and I took it back to my hiding place. For so long, the beasts referred to in Revelation had been a mystery to me, but

now I learned that these represented political organizations that exist in our 20th century. I began to comprehend that the Bible has practical meaning for our times and that I should study it and adapt my life according to its truths.

### Captured and Imprisoned

Shortly thereafter, soldiers burst into my hiding place and arrested me. I was thrown into a dungeon cell. Since I had been a wanted outlaw for some time, I expected to be executed. There, in my cell, I received a visit from the Witness who had first spoken to me. He encouraged me to trust implicitly in Jehovah, which I did. I was sentenced to exile for six months on the Aegean island of Ikaria.

As soon as I arrived, I identified myself, not as a Communist, but as a Witness of Jehovah. Others who had learned Bible truths were also exiled there, so I located them, and we regularly studied the Bible together. They helped me to gain more knowledge from the Scriptures and a better understanding of our trustworthy God, Jehovah.

In 1947, when my sentence ended, I was summoned to the office of the public prosecutor. He told me that he was impressed with my conduct and said that I could use his name as a reference should I ever be exiled again. Upon arriving in Athens, where my family had moved in the meantime, I began to associate with a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses and soon was baptized in symbol of my dedication to Jehovah.

### Charged for Proselytism

For decades, Greece prosecuted Jehovah's Witnesses under laws passed in 1938 and 1939 forbidding proselytism. Thus, from 1938 to 1992, there were 19,147 arrests of Witnesses in Greece, and the courts imposed sentences that totaled 753 years,

593 of which were actually served. Personally, I was arrested more than 40 times for preaching the good news of God's Kingdom, and altogether I served 27 months in various prisons.

One of my arrests came as a result of a letter I had written to a Greek Orthodox clergyman in Chalcis. In 1955, congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses had been urged to send the booklet *Christendom or Christianity—Which One Is "the Light of the World"?* to all clergymen. One of the high-ranking clergymen to whom I had written sued me for proselytism. During the trial, both the Witness attorney and the local lawyer gave a masterful defense, explaining the obligation that true Christians have to preach the good news about God's Kingdom.—Matthew 24:14.

The presiding judge of the court asked the archimandrite (a church dignitary ranking below a bishop): "Did you read the letter and the booklet?"

"No," he replied vehemently, "I tore them up and got rid of them as soon as I opened the envelope!"

"Then how can you say that this man proselytized you?" the presiding judge inquired.

Next our attorney cited examples of professors and others who donated entire stacks of books to public libraries. "Would you say that those people tried to proselytize others?" he asked.

Clearly, such activity did not constitute proselytizing. I thanked Jehovah when I heard the verdict: "Not guilty."

### My Son's Death

My son George was also continually harassed, usually at the instigation of Orthodox clergymen. He too was arrested scores of times because of his youthful zeal in

declaring the good news of God's Kingdom. Finally, the opposers decided to get rid of him and, at the same time, send an intimidating message to the rest of us to stop preaching.

The policeman who came to our house to report George's death said that the local Greek Orthodox priest and some paramilitary leaders had conspired to kill our son. Such "accidents" were common during those perilous times. Despite the grief his death caused, our determination to keep active in the preaching work and to trust fully in Jehovah was only strengthened.

### Helping Others Trust in Jehovah

During the mid-1960's, my wife and children would spend summer months in the coastal village of Skala Oropos, about 30 miles from Athens. At the time, no Witnesses lived there, so we did informal witnessing to neighbors. Some local farmers responded favorably. Since the men worked long hours in their fields during the day, we conducted Bible studies with them late at night, and a number became Witnesses.

Seeing how Jehovah was blessing our efforts, for some 15 years, we traveled there every week in order to conduct Bible studies with interested ones. Almost 30 persons we studied with there have progressed to the point of baptism. Initially, a study group was formed, and I was assigned to conduct the meetings. Later the group became a congregation, and today more than a hundred Witnesses from that area form the Malakasa Congregation. We rejoice that four of the persons we helped are now serving as full-time ministers.

### A Rich Heritage

Shortly after I dedicated my life to Jehovah, my wife began to progress spiritually and was baptized. During the difficult period of persecution, her faith remained

strong and she kept firm and unwavering in her integrity. She never complained about the many hardships suffered as a result of my frequent imprisonments.

Over the years, we conducted many Bible studies together, and she effectively helped many with her simple and enthusiastic approach. Presently, she has a magazine route that includes dozens of people to whom she regularly delivers *The Watchtower* and *Awake!*

Largely because of the support of my loving mate, our three living children and their families, which include six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren, are all active in Jehovah's service. Although they have not had to cope with the persecution and bitter opposition that my wife and I faced, they have put their implicit trust in Jehovah, and they keep walking in his ways. What a joy it will be for all of us to be reunited with our dear George when he returns in the resurrection!

### Determined to Trust in Jehovah

During all these years, I have seen Jehovah's spirit operating upon his people. His spirit-directed organization has helped me to see that we cannot put our trust in the efforts of humans. Their promises for a better future are worthless, amounting to nothing more than a big lie.—Psalm 146:3, 4.

Despite my advancing years and severe health problems, my eyes are focused on the reality of the Kingdom hope. I truly regret the years I spent devoted to false religion and to trying to bring about better conditions through political means. If I were to live my life over, without question I would again decide to serve Jehovah, the trustworthy God.

(Kimon Progakis recently fell asleep in death. He had an earthly hope.)

# KINGDOM PROCLAIMERS REPORT

## Help for "Thirsting" Ones in Russia

"HAPPY are those hungering and thirsting for righteousness, since they will be filled," said Jesus. (Matthew 5:6) The following experiences illustrate how Jehovah's Witnesses are helping to satisfy the spiritual thirst of many in Russia, where religious expression was curtailed for over 70 years.

■ A woman named Valentina had serious Bible questions that had gone unanswered for many years. For example, she wondered: 'To whom did Jesus pray?' She reasoned that Jesus must have prayed to someone higher than himself and wondered about the name of this One.

She visited the Russian Orthodox Church. However, in that religion she did not find the answers to her questions. Not satisfied, she went to a Protestant church but again found no clear answers. Not knowing where else to go, Valentina began to read the Bible, trying to find answers by herself—to no avail. She prayed for help.

Some time later Jehovah's Witnesses knocked at her door. They showed her from the Bible that God's name is Jehovah. At last, she learned to whom it was that Jesus prayed! She began to study the Bible regularly with the Witnesses. Often she stayed up all night reading literature published by the Watch Tower Society and looking up Bible texts. Soon Valentina concluded that she had found the truth. Within three months she began sharing in the preaching work, and two months after that, she was baptized. Her prayerful search for truth was rewarded.

■ A Witness traveled by bus to preach in a remote area. During the trip he spoke to a young woman about the Bible's promises, but the young woman was not interested. Two months later the Witness made a second trip to the same area to give a public talk. After the talk he approached a visitor and asked him: "Has some-

one already spoken to you about the good news from the Bible?" The man answered, "Yes, you have." The Witness thought he was joking. But the young man explained that two months earlier he had overheard the conversation between the Witness and the young woman, during the bus trip. "I wanted to know more, but you got off the bus, and I thought I would never see Jehovah's Witnesses again. Then at my workplace I met a man who is studying the Bible with the Witnesses. And so here I am!"

The man and his wife began studying the Bible. After a very short time, he could see that his employment was in conflict with Bible principles. Wanting to keep a good conscience before God, he changed his occupation. Now he tells others about God's Kingdom at every opportunity. His wife is also progressing in her study of the Bible.

Jehovah's Witnesses in the vast territory of Russia are pleased to have a share in saying to all sincere people: "'Come!' And let anyone thirsting come; let anyone that wishes take life's water free."—Revelation 22:17.



## QUESTIONS FROM READERS

### Would it be wise for a Christian to consult a mental-health practitioner?

Reports from some lands indicate that there has been an increase in emotional and mental illnesses in these "last days." (2 Timothy 3:1) Christians feel deep compassion when fellow believers are affected, but they recognize that each one must decide for himself whether to seek treatment for his illness and, if so, what kind of treatment.\* "Each one will carry his own load." (Galatians 6:5) Some, suffering severely from schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, deep clinical depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, self-mutilation, and other distressing disorders, have been able to live fairly normal lives after obtaining the right professional help.

In some places it has become quite fashionable to seek therapy. In many cases the patient does not have a severe mental disorder but has difficulty coping with some situation in life. However, it is the Bible that gives the most effective help in handling the difficult problems of life. (Psalm 119:28, 143) Through the Bible, Jehovah supplies wisdom, thinking ability, and true knowledge—things that fortify us mentally and emotionally. (Proverbs 2:1-11; Hebrews 13:6) Faithful servants of God may express themselves irrationally at times because of severe inner turmoil. (Job 6:2, 3) James 5:13-16 encourages such ones to call on the elders for help and counsel. A Christian may be spiritually sick, or he may be distressed by an unchangeable circumstance or by oppressive stresses, or he may feel that he is the victim of injustice. (Ecclesiastes 7:7; Isaiah 32:2; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10) Such a person can find help with the elders, who will 'grease him with oil'—that is, skillfully impart comforting Bible counsel—and also "pray over him." The

\* Sometimes an individual may be asked to undergo a psychiatric evaluation, perhaps when being considered for high-level employment. Whether one submits to such an evaluation or not is a personal decision, but it should be noted that a psychiatric evaluation is not psychiatric treatment.

result? "The prayer of faith will make the indisposed one well, and Jehovah will raise him up [out of his despondency or his feeling of being abandoned by God]."

What, though, if a person's mental distress and confusion persist despite the skillful help of spiritual shepherds? Some in this situation have chosen to undergo a thorough physical examination. (Compare Proverbs 14:30; 16:24; 1 Corinthians 12:26.) A physical problem may lie behind emotional or mental distress. Treating such a problem has in some cases given relief to the emotionally ill person.\* If no physical problem is found, the physician, upon request, may recommend a mental-health professional. What then? As stated, this is a decision each individual must weigh for himself. Others should not criticize or judge.—Romans 14:4.

Nevertheless, practical wisdom must be exercised and care taken not to forget Bible principles. (Proverbs 3:21; Ecclesiastes 12:13) In the case of physical sickness, patients are faced with a variety of treatment choices, from orthodox medicine to therapies such as naturopathy, acupuncture, and homeopathy. There are also different kinds of mental-health practitioners. Among them are analytic psychotherapists and others, who may delve into the patient's personal history to try to find reasons for irregular behavior or painful emotions. Behavioral psychotherapists may try to help the patient learn new behavior patterns. Some mental-health practitioners believe that most mental illnesses should be treated with drugs.\* Reportedly, others recommend diet and vitamins.

\* See "Winning the Battle Against Depression," in the March 1, 1990, issue of *The Watchtower*.

\* Some mental illnesses seem to respond well to the correct medications. But these medications must be used with caution under the guidance of skilled and experienced medical physicians or psychiatrists, since there can be severe side effects if dosages are not correctly adjusted.

Patients and their families should use caution when considering these choices. (Proverbs 14:15) Significantly, Professor Paul McHugh, director of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, said that the mental-health profession "is a rudimentary medical art. It lacks easy access to proof of its proposals even as it deals with disorders of the most complex features of human life—mind and behavior." This situation leaves the door open to eccentricity and fraud, as well as well-intentioned treatments that may do more harm than good.

It should be mentioned, too, that while psychiatrists and psychologists have professional, postgraduate degrees, many others with no professional qualifications practice without supervision as counselors or therapists. Some individuals have spent a lot of money consulting such unqualified people.

Even with a trained, qualified mental-health professional, there are things to consider. When choosing a medical doctor or surgeon, we have to be sure that he will respect our Bible-based views. Similarly, it would be dangerous to consult a mental-health professional who does not respect our religious and moral views. Many Christians are striving hard, despite mental and emotional confusion, to have "the same mental attitude that Christ Jesus had." (Romans 15:5) Such are rightly concerned about the attitudes of anyone who might affect their thinking or behavior. Some practitioners view any restrictions imposed by Scriptural beliefs as unnecessary and potentially harmful to mental health. They may approve, even recommend, practices condemned in the Bible, such as homosexuality or marital infidelity.

These ideas are included in what the apostle Paul called "the contradictions of the falsely called 'knowledge.'" (1 Timothy 6:20) They contradict the truth about the Christ and are part of "the philosophy and empty deception" of this world. (Colossians 2:8) The Bible's touchstone is clear: "There is no wisdom, nor any discernment, nor any counsel in opposition to Jehovah." (Prov-

erbs 21:30) Mental-health practitioners who say "good is bad and bad is good" are "bad associations." Far from helping to heal unstable minds, they will "spoil useful habits."—Isaiah 5:20; 1 Corinthians 15:33.

So a Christian who feels that it is necessary to consult a mental-health professional should scrutinize the qualifications, attitude, and reputation of the practitioner and the possible effect of any treatment recommended. If a distressed Christian cannot do this himself, perhaps a mature, close friend or relative may be able to help. A Christian who is uncertain as to the wisdom of a particular treatment may find that talking with the elders in the congregation is helpful—although the final decision is his own (or his parents', or the joint decision of husband and wife).\*

Science can do much more today than in times past to alleviate suffering. Still, there are many diseases—both physical and mental—that at present are incurable and have to be endured through this system of things. (James 5:11) In the meantime "the faithful and discreet slave," the elders, and all others in the congregation reach out a hand of compassion and support to sick ones. And Jehovah himself strengthens them to endure until that glorious time when sickness will be no more.—Matthew 24:45; Psalm 41:1-3; Isaiah 33:24.

\* See the article "Mental Distress—When It Afflicts a Christian" in the October 15, 1988, issue of The Watchtower.

## In Our Next Issue

Do All Religions Please God?

All Must Render an Account to God

Lydia—Hospitable Worshiper of God

# "Don't Throw Them Out!"

**I**F ONE of Jehovah's Witnesses, or even two, should ring your doorbell, don't throw them out!" advises *Corriere della Sera*. The newspaper was referring to an episode that took place in Treviso, northern Italy, in which a businessman risked losing over a million lire (more than \$600, U.S.) because of turning away two Witnesses who paid him a visit.

According to the newspaper, two Witnesses introduced themselves to the man with the words: "Today is a good day for you. We are Jehovah's Witnesses, and we have something valuable to give you." At that, the ill-disposed businessman shut the door, not allowing them to finish.

If the man had listened, he would have learned that the Witnesses had gone to his home to return his wallet, which they found on a park bench. So the Witnesses were able to do no more than take the wallet with its contents to the nearest police station. The following day, the police returned it to its rightful owner.

"If someone else had been in the shoes of the two unfortunate [Witnesses]," said *Il Gazzettino di Treviso*, "he would probably have . . . kept the wallet's considerable contents. But not Jehovah's Witnesses, who must be completely honest."

What moves Jehovah's Witnesses to be "completely honest"? It is their love for God and for neighbor, in accord with the teachings of Jesus Christ. (Matthew 22:37-39) That is also why Jehovah's Witnesses go from house to house to declare the good news about the marvelous "new earth" promised by Jehovah God. Such a message of hope is worth far more than any material possession!—2 Peter 3:13.

