



THE WATCHTOWER

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STUDY EDITION

STUDY ARTICLES FOR THE WEEKS OF:

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Things From Which We Must Flee

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

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PURPOSE OF STUDY ARTICLES

Study Articles 1, 2 PAGES 7-15

We can be sure that God loves us. One indication is that he identifies four things from which Christians should flee. What are these, and how can we do so? Similarly, the Bible identifies seven things that we should pursue. What are they, and how can we pursue them?

Study Article 3 PAGES 18-22

A spirit of independence is common in the world. Hence, how can we cultivate a proper view of authority, particularly Jehovah's? This article will help us see how to do this and how to guard against the independent spirit that Satan encourages.

Study Article 4 PAGES 22-26

This study article will help us to analyze why we accepted the truth and came to love Jehovah. It offers suggestions on how a person can rekindle his first love for Jehovah and the truth if that love has dimmed over the years.

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POWERFUL DESPITE WEAKNESSES

YOUR weaknesses can overwhelm you. They cling like leeches. You may think that you will never overcome them, or you may feel inadequate, comparing yourself with others and deciding that you do not measure up. On the other hand, you may be dealing with a debilitating illness that drains your energy and zest for life. Whatever the

cause, you seem to be trapped. You can relate to Job, who said to God: "O that in Sheol you would conceal me, that you would keep me secret until your anger turns back, that you would set a time limit for me and remember me!"—Job 14:13.

How can you break out of such despair? Hard as it may be, you need to take your mind off your problems for a while. For example, you might consider Jehovah's inspired questions to his faithful servant Job: "Where did you happen to be when I founded the earth? Tell me, if you do know understanding. Who set its measurements, in case you know, or who stretched out upon it the measuring line?" (Job 38:4, 5) As we think of the import of those questions, we are likely moved to acknowledge Jehovah's superior wisdom and power. He has allowed the present world situation to continue for good reason.



*Paul continually
prayed to Jehovah to guide him in
accomplishing his ministry*

"A Thorn in the Flesh"

Another faithful servant asked Jehovah to remove "a thorn in the flesh," a nagging problem. The apostle Paul entreated God three times to be set free from this trial. Whatever it was, like an irritating thorn, it could have robbed Paul of his joy in Jehovah's service. Paul likened it to being constantly slapped.

Jehovah's answer was: "My undeserved kindness is sufficient for you; for my power is being made perfect in weakness." Jehovah did not take away that thorn in the flesh. Paul had to contend with it, but he added: "When I am weak, then I am powerful." (2 Cor. 12:7-10) What did he mean?

Paul's problem did not miraculously disappear. Still, it did not prevent him from accomplishing remarkable things in Jehovah's service. Paul relied on Jehovah for support and constantly asked for his help. (Phil. 4:6, 7) Toward the end of his earthly life, Paul could say: "I have fought the fine fight, I have run the course to the finish, I have observed the faith."—2 Tim. 4:7.

Jehovah uses imperfect men to accomplish his will despite their shortcomings and problems, and the honor rightly goes to him. He can give them guidance and wisdom to cope with their difficulties and to maintain their joy in his service. Yes, he can use imperfect humans to do great works despite their weaknesses.

Paul stated why God did not remove his thorn in the flesh: "That I might not be overly exalted." (2 Cor. 12:7) Paul's "thorn" reminded him of his limitations and helped him to maintain a humble view of himself. That is in line with what Jesus taught: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (Matt. 23:12) Trials can teach God's servants humility and help them to appreciate that to endure faithfully they need to rely on Jehovah. Thus, like the apostle, they can "boast in Jehovah."—1 Cor. 1:31.

Concealed Weaknesses

Some may have weaknesses that they are not aware of or that they are reluctant to acknowledge. For example, a person may be overconfident, trusting in his own resources. (1 Cor. 10:12) Another weakness common to

imperfect humans is the desire for prominence.

Joab, who became general of King David's army, was courageous, decisive, and resourceful. Yet, Joab was guilty of serious misconduct that indicated a presumptuous, ambitious spirit. He brutally murdered two army generals. First he acted out of revenge to eliminate Abner. Later, under the pretext of greeting his cousin Amasa, Joab took hold of Amasa's beard with his right hand as if to kiss him and then ran him through with the sword in his left hand. (2 Sam. 17:25; 20:8-10) Joab had been replaced by Amasa as army general and used this opportunity to get rid of his rival, probably in hopes of being reinstated as general. You can see that Joab did not control his spirit, including his selfish ambition. He acted ruthlessly with no indication of remorse. When King David was near the end of his life, he instructed his son Solomon to see to it that Joab paid for his badness.—1 Ki. 2:5, 6, 29-35.

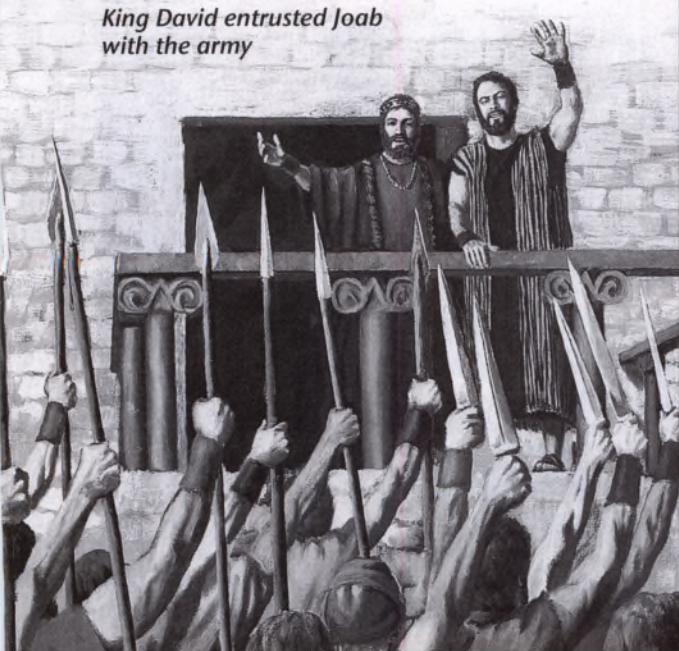
We should certainly not give in to our wrong desires; we can gain the mastery over our weaknesses. First we must recognize and acknowledge them. Then we can take action to overcome them. We can regularly pray to Jehovah, asking for his help to conquer those weaknesses, and diligently study his Word, looking for ways to fight those inclinations. (Heb. 4:12) We may need to work on our shortcomings continually and not become disheartened. The battle may even continue for as long as we are imperfect. Paul acknowledged this in his own case, writing: "What I wish, this I do not practice; but what I hate is what I do." As you are aware, though, Paul did not resign himself to this, as if his actions were completely beyond his control. On the contrary, he kept struggling against his weaknesses, relying on God's help through Jesus Christ. (Rom. 7:15-25) Elsewhere, Paul said: "I pummel my

body and lead it as a slave, that, after I have preached to others, I myself should not become disapproved somehow."—1 Cor. 9:27.

Humans tend to justify themselves. We can work against that by cultivating Jehovah's view, doing as Paul admonished Christians: "Abhor what is wicked, cling to what is good." (Rom. 12:9) In our battle to overcome our weaknesses, we will need honesty, perseverance, and self-discipline. David requested of Jehovah: "Refine my kidneys and my heart." (Ps. 26:2) He knew that God can accurately assess our deepest inclinations and give us help when we need it. If we respond to the guidance Jehovah provides through his Word and his holy spirit, we can make progress toward gaining the victory over our shortcomings.

Some may be troubled by issues that they feel they are not able to deal with on their own. The congregation elders can certainly offer loving aid and encouragement. (Isa. 32: 1, 2) But it is wise to have realistic expectations. To some problems, there are no complete solutions in this present system of things. Nevertheless, many have learned to cope, and that has enabled them to lead productive lives.

King David entrusted Joab with the army

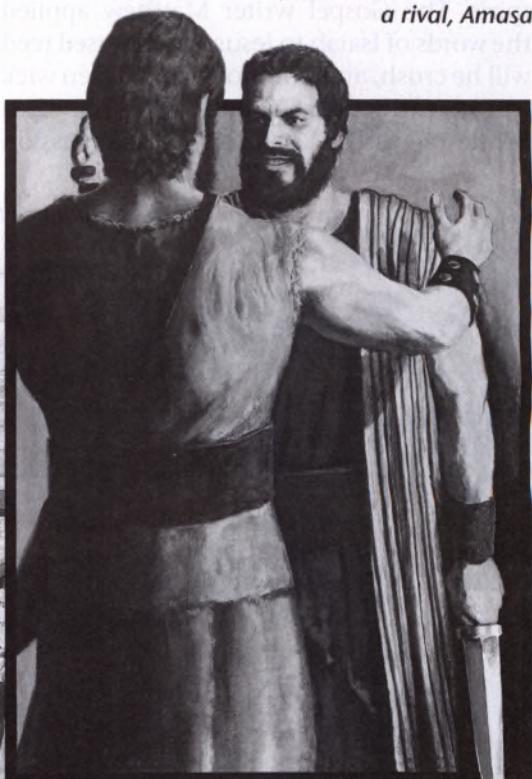


Assurance of Jehovah's Support

Whatever problems we face in these difficult times, we can rest assured that Jehovah will guide and sustain us. The Bible urges us: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; while you throw all your anxiety upon him, because he cares for you."—1 Pet. 5:6, 7.

When Kathy, who has been serving at Bethel for many years, realized that her husband had Alzheimer's disease, she did not feel equal to the challenges ahead. Supplicating Jehovah for wisdom and emotional strength became a daily necessity. As her husband's condition gradually deteriorated, loving brothers took the time to inform themselves about dealing with the disease and caring sisters gave emotional support.

Joab acted to eliminate a rival, Amasa



These Christians were part of the strengthening support that Jehovah gave, and Kathy was able to care for her husband until his death about 11 years later. She says: "I tearfully and fervently thanked Jehovah for all his help; it kept me going. I did not know that it was possible to keep functioning for so long while being so weak from exhaustion!"

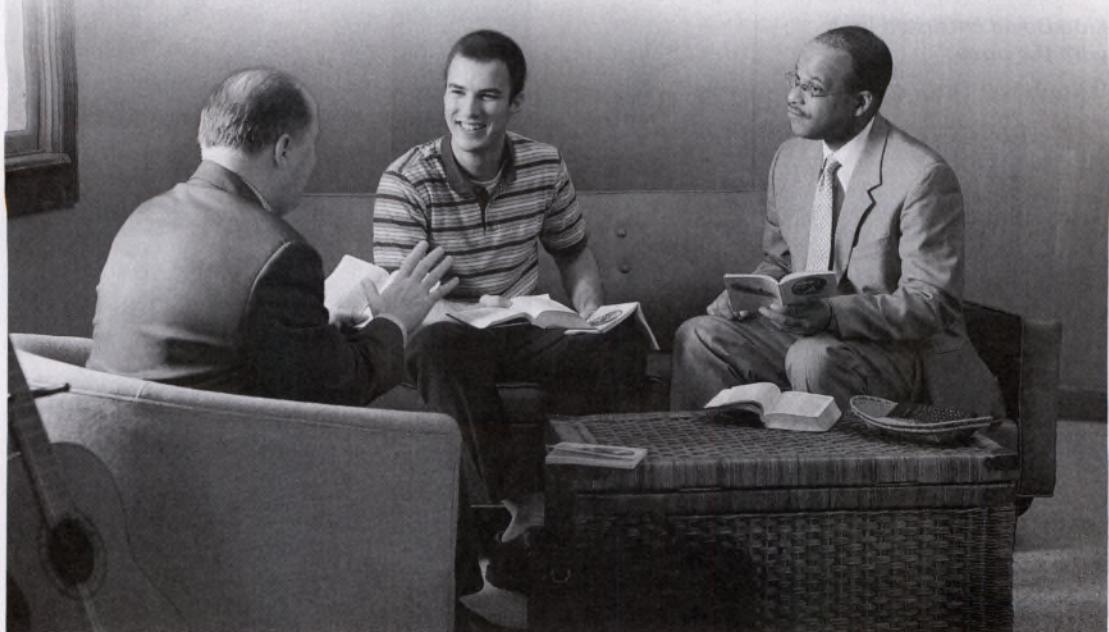
Help to Overcome Concealed Weaknesses

When individuals feel unworthy, they may think that Jehovah will not listen to their call for help in their time of distress. It is particularly good then to reflect on what David said when he felt remorse for his serious sin with Bath-sheba: "A heart broken and crushed, O God, you will not despise." (Ps. 51:17) David was sincerely repentant, and he knew that he could approach God and count on his mercy. Jesus reflects Jehovah's caring spirit. The Gospel writer Matthew applied the words of Isaiah to Jesus: "No bruised reed will he crush, and no smoldering flaxen wick will he extinguish." (Matt. 12:20; Isa. 42:3) While on earth, Jesus showed compassion

for the lowly and the downtrodden. He did not, as it were, extinguish the last spark of life of one who was like the wick of an oil lamp about to go out. Rather, he tenderly nurtured suffering ones to restore in them the flame of life. That was how he was as he walked among humans. Do you not believe that Jesus is still that way and that he is able to sympathize with your weaknesses? Note that Hebrews 4:15 indicates that he is One who can "sympathize with our weaknesses."

When writing about his "thorn in the flesh," Paul observed that the power of the Christ was "like a tent" over him. (2 Cor. 12: 7-9) He felt God's protection through Christ, just as a person in a tent feels protected from the elements. Like Paul, we do not have to give in to our weaknesses and problems. To remain spiritually strong, we can use all the provisions that Jehovah gives us through his earthly congregation. We can do everything humanly possible and then look to Jehovah with full assurance that he will guide our steps. Experiencing how God's power makes up for our weaknesses, we will be able to say as did Paul: "When I am weak, then I am powerful."—2 Cor. 12:10.

Elders give loving Scriptural guidance that can help us to cope with our problems



THINGS FROM WHICH WE MUST FLEE

"You offspring of vipers, who has intimated to you to flee from the coming wrath?"

—MATT. 3:7.

WHAT do you think of when you hear the word "flee"? Some may see in their mind's eye the handsome young man Joseph fleeing from the immoral grasp of Potiphar's wife. (Gen. 39:7-12) Others might think of Christians who fled from Jerusalem in the year 66 C.E., obeying Jesus' warning: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by encamped armies, then . . . let those in Judea begin fleeing to the mountains, and let those in the midst of her withdraw."—Luke 21:20, 21.

² The examples mentioned above involved fleeing in a literal way. Today, for true Christians in almost every land around the globe, there is an urgent need to flee in a figurative way. John the Baptist used the word "flee" in such a sense. Among those coming to see John were self-righteous Jewish religious leaders who felt no need to repent. They looked down on the common people who were getting baptized in symbol of repentance. Fearlessly, John exposed those hypocritical leaders: "You offspring of vipers, who has intimated to you to flee from the coming wrath? So then produce fruit that befits repentance."—Matt. 3:7, 8.

³ John was not speaking of a physical flight. He was warning of a coming judgment, a day of wrath; and he put the religious leaders on notice that if they were to escape during that day, they would need to produce

1. What are some Bible examples of fleeing?
- 2, 3. (a) What was the import of John the Baptist's criticism of the religious leaders? (b) How did Jesus strengthen the warning that John had given?

fruit that proved their repentance. Later, Jesus fearlessly denounced the religious leaders—their murderous attitude showed that their real father was the Devil. (John 8:44) Strengthening John's earlier warning, Jesus called them "offspring of vipers" and asked: "How are you to flee from the judgment of Gehenna?" (Matt. 23:33) What did Jesus mean by "Gehenna"?

⁴ Gehenna was a valley area outside the walls of Jerusalem where rubbish and the carcasses of dead animals were burned. Jesus used Gehenna as a symbol of eternal death. (See page 27.) His question about escaping from Gehenna showed that those religious leaders as a class were fit for everlasting destruction.—Matt. 5:22, 29.

⁵ The Jewish leaders compounded their sins by persecuting Jesus and his followers. Later, as John and Jesus had warned, God's day of wrath came. In that case, "the coming wrath" was centered on one particular locale, Jerusalem and Judea, so it could have been possible to flee in a literal way. The wrath was expressed when Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed by Roman armies in 70 C.E. That "tribulation" was greater than anything Jerusalem had ever experienced. Many were killed or taken captive. This pointed to a greater destruction that awaits many professed Christians and those of other religions.—Matt. 24:21.

4. What did Jesus mean by "Gehenna"?
5. Historically, how did what John and Jesus warned about work out?



A Future Wrath From Which to Flee

⁶ Some among the early Christians turned apostate and gained followers. (Acts 20:29, 30) While Jesus' apostles were living, they acted as "a restraint" against such apostasy, but after they died, many false Christian sects developed. Today, there are hundreds of conflicting religions in the realm of Christendom. The Bible pointed to the rise of Christendom's clergy, describing them collectively as "the man of lawlessness" and "the son of destruction . . . whom the Lord Jesus will do away with . . . and bring to nothing by the manifestation of his presence." —2 Thess. 2:3, 6-8.

⁷ Christendom's clergy are lawless in that they have misled millions by promoting teachings, holidays, and behavior contrary to the Bible. Like the religious leaders whom Jesus condemned, the modern-day worshippers who are part of "the son of destruction" face destruction with no hope of a resurrection. (2 Thess. 1:6-9) What, though, awaits people who have been misled by Christendom's clergy and by clerics of other forms of false religion? To answer this question, let us consider events that followed an earlier destruction of Jerusalem, in 607 B.C.E.

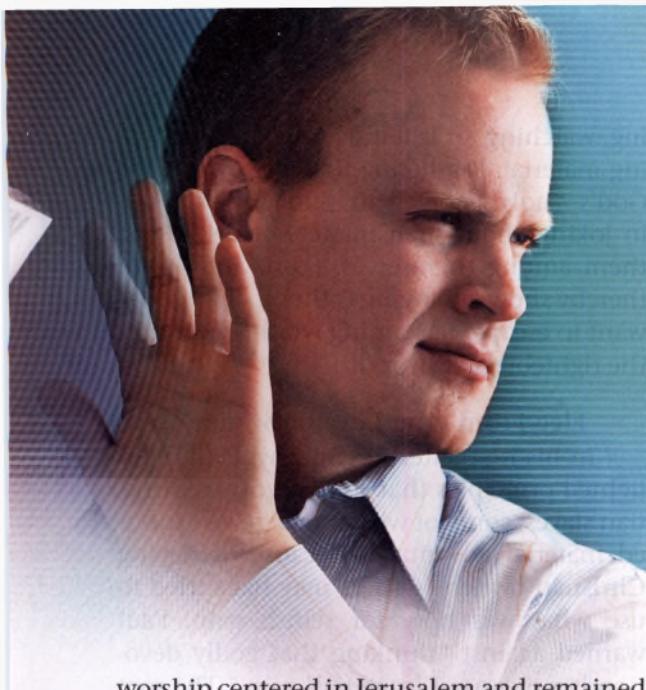
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6. What began to develop in the early Christian congregation?
 7. Why does the expression "man of lawlessness" fit Christendom's clergy?

"Flee Out of the Midst of Babylon"

⁸ The prophet Jeremiah foretold the destruction of Jerusalem that occurred in 607 B.C.E. He said that God's people would be carried into captivity but would be restored to their homeland after "seventy years." (Jer. 29:4, 10) For Jews captive in Babylon, Jeremiah had an important message; they were to stay uncontaminated by the false religion that was practiced in Babylon. Thus they would be ready to return to Jerusalem and restore pure worship when the set time arrived. This happened soon after the Medes and the Persians conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.E. Persian King Cyrus II issued a decree for the Jews to return and rebuild Jehovah's temple in Jerusalem.—Ezra 1:1-4.

⁹ Thousands of Jews seized this opportunity and returned. (Ezra 2:64-67) In doing so, they fulfilled Jeremiah's prophetic command that in their case involved fleeing in one sense, getting away to another location. (*Read Jeremiah 51:6, 45, 50.*) Circumstances did not permit all the Jews to make the long trip back to Jerusalem and Judah. Those remaining in Babylon, such as the aged prophet Daniel, could have God's blessing, provided they wholeheartedly supported pure

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- 8, 9. (a) Jeremiah had what prophetic message for Jews captive in Babylon? (b) After the conquest of Babylon by the Medes and the Persians, what sort of fleeing became possible?



worship centered in Jerusalem and remained separate from Babylonian false worship.

¹⁰ Today, billions of humans are involved in various forms of false religion that can be traced back to ancient Babylon. (Gen. 11:6-9) Collectively, those religions are designated as “Babylon the Great, the mother of the harlots and of the disgusting things of the earth.” (Rev. 17:5) False religion has a long history of supporting the political rulers of this world. Among “the disgusting things” that she bears responsibility for are the many wars that have resulted in hundreds of millions being “slaughtered on the earth.” (Rev. 18:24) Additional “disgusting things” include acts of pedophilia and other forms of sexual immorality committed by clergymen and tolerated by the church authorities. Is it any wonder that Jehovah God will soon rid this earth of false religion? —Rev. 18:8.

¹¹ True Christians, who know this, have an obligation to warn members of Babylon the

10. “Babylon the Great” is responsible for what sort of “disgusting things”?

11. Until Babylon the Great is destroyed, true Christians have what obligation?

What do you think of when you hear the word “flee”?

Great. One way they do so is by distributing Bibles and related literature published by “the faithful and discreet slave,” whom Jesus appointed to provide spiritual “food at the proper time.” (Matt. 24:45) When individuals show an interest in the Bible’s message, arrangements are made to help them by means of a Bible study. Hopefully, they will see the need to “flee out of the midst of Babylon” before it is too late.—Rev. 18:4.

Flee From Idolatry

¹² Another disgusting practice common in Babylon the Great is the veneration of images and idols. God calls them “disgusting things” and “dungy idols.” (Deut. 29:17) All who want to please God must avoid idolatry, in harmony with God’s statement: “I am Jehovah. That is my name; and to no one else shall I give my own glory, neither my praise to graven images.”—Isa. 42:8.

¹³ God’s Word also exposes subtle forms of idolatry. For example, it calls covetousness “idolatry.” (Col. 3:5) To covet means to desire what is forbidden, such as another person’s possessions. (Ex. 20:17) The angel who became Satan the Devil developed a covetous desire to resemble the Most High and to be worshipped. (Luke 4:5-7) This led him to rebel against Jehovah and to seduce Eve into coveting something God had forbidden. In a sense, Adam also committed idolatry by allowing his selfish desire for his wife’s companionship to be more important than obedience to his loving heavenly Father. In contrast, all who want to flee God’s day of wrath must give him exclusive devotion and resist any such covetousness.

12. How does God view the veneration of images and idols?

13. We need to flee from what subtle forms of idolatry?

"Flee From Fornication"

¹⁴ Read 1 Corinthians 6:18. When Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph, he literally fled from her. What a fine example he set for Christians, both single and married! Clearly, Joseph's conscience had been molded by earlier indications of God's thinking. If we want to obey the command to "flee from fornication," we will avoid things that might arouse sexual desire for someone other than our mate. We are told: "Deaden . . . your body members . . . as respects fornication, uncleanness, sexual appetite, hurtful desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of those things the wrath of God is coming."—Col. 3:5, 6.

¹⁵ Notice that "the wrath of God is coming." Many in the world develop improper sexual desires and succumb to them. Hence, we Christians need to pray for God's help and holy spirit so that unclean sexual desires do not control us. In addition, studying the Bible, attending Christian meetings, and sharing the good news with our neighbors will help us to "keep walking by spirit." Thus we "will carry out no fleshly desire at all." —Gal. 5:16.

¹⁶ Certainly, if we view pornography, we will not be "walking by spirit." Similarly, every Christian needs to guard against read-

14-16. (a) Why was Joseph such a good moral example? (b) What should we do if we experience unclean sexual desire? (c) How can we succeed in fleeing from fornication?

How Would You Answer?

- Jesus gave what warning to religious leaders?
- What dangerous situation do millions face today?
- From what subtle forms of idolatry must we flee?

ing, watching, or listening to sexually arousing material. Paralleling that, it is wrong for God's "holy people" to find any pleasure in joking about such matters or discussing them among themselves. (Eph. 5:3, 4) We thereby show our loving Father that we really want to escape his coming wrath and live in the righteous new world.

Flee From "the Love of Money"

¹⁷ In his first letter to Timothy, Paul highlighted principles that should govern Christian slaves, some of whom may have expected material advantages because of having Christian owners. Others may have tried to use what was holy for selfish gain. Paul warned against "thinking that godly devotion is a means of [material] gain." The root of the problem may have been "the love of money," which can have a bad effect on anyone, rich or poor.—1 Tim. 6:1, 2, 5, 9, 10.

¹⁸ Can you think of Bible examples of individuals whose relationship with God was damaged by "the love of money" or the love of nonessential things that money can buy? (Josh. 7:11, 21; 2 Ki. 5:20, 25-27) Paul urged Timothy: "You, O man of God, flee from these things. But pursue righteousness, godly devotion, faith, love, endurance, mildness of temper." (1 Tim. 6:11) Heeding that advice is vital for all who want to survive the coming day of wrath.

"Flee From the Desires Incidental to Youth"

¹⁹ Read Proverbs 22:15. The foolishness in the heart of a youth can easily lead him or her astray. Something that can help to counter this is Bible-based discipline. Many Christian youths whose parents do not share their faith seek to find and apply principles set out

17, 18. Why must we flee from "the love of money"?

19. All youths need what?

in the Bible. Others benefit from the wise advice of spiritually mature ones in the congregation. Regardless of who gives Bible-based counsel, submitting to it can lead to happiness both now and in the future.—Heb. 12: 8-11.

²⁰ Read 2 Timothy 2:20-22. Many a youthful heart lacking beneficial discipline has fallen prey to foolish ways, such as a competitive spirit, covetousness, fornication, the love of money, and the pursuit of pleasure. These reflect “desires incidental to youth,” from which the Bible urges us to flee. Fleeing requires that a Christian youth guard against unwholesome influences, wherever they might surface. Especially helpful is the divine advice to pursue godly qualities “along

20. How can youths find help to flee from wrong desires?

with those who call upon the Lord out of a clean heart.”

²¹ Whether we are young or old, refusal to listen to people who try to mislead us shows that we want to be counted among Jesus’ sheeplike followers who “flee from . . . the voice of strangers.” (John 10:5) Escaping God’s day of wrath, however, requires more of us than just fleeing from harmful things. We must also pursue qualities that are positive. The next article will consider seven of these. We have good reason to look into this further, for Jesus makes this wonderful promise: “I give [my sheep] everlasting life, and they will by no means ever be destroyed, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”—John 10:28.

21. What wonderful promise did Jesus Christ make about his sheeplike followers?

QUALITIES WE MUST PURSUE

“Pursue righteousness, godly devotion, faith, love, endurance, [and] mildness of temper.”—1 TIM. 6:11.

WHAT comes to mind when you hear the word “pursue”? Perhaps you think of Moses’ day when the Egyptian army “took up the pursuit” of Israel, only to suffer disaster in the Red Sea. (Ex. 14:23) Or you may recall the danger faced by an accidental manslayer in ancient Israel. He quickly had to get to one of six designated cities of refuge. Otherwise “the blood-avenger, pursuing the manslayer in hot anger, [might] overtake him and kill him.”—Deut. 19:6, *Tanakh*.

² In contrast to the above Biblical exam-

1. Illustrate what the word “pursue” means.
2. (a) What prize has God invited some Christians to pursue? (b) What prospect does Jehovah hold out to most Christians today?

ples, consider the positive attitude that the apostle Paul had: “I am pursuing down toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God by means of Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:14) The Bible shows that a total of 144,000 anointed Christians, Paul included, receive that prize of heavenly life. They will share with Jesus Christ in his Millennial Reign over the earth. What a wonderful goal such ones have been invited by God to pursue! The vast majority of true Christians today, however, have a different prospect, or goal. Jehovah lovingly holds out to them what Adam and Eve lost, namely, the prospect of everlasting life in perfect health on a paradise earth.—Rev. 7:4, 9; 21:1-4.

³ Sinful humans cannot earn everlasting life by their imperfect efforts to do what is right. (Isa. 64:6) Gaining everlasting life is possible only by putting faith in God's loving provision of salvation through Jesus Christ. What can we do to show our appreciation for that undeserved kindness of God? For one thing, we can obey this command: "Pursue righteousness, godly devotion, faith, love, endurance, [and] mildness of temper." (1 Tim. 6:11) Considering these qualities may help each of us to be more determined to go on pursuing them "more fully." —1 Thess. 4:1.

"Pursue Righteousness"

⁴ In both of his letters to Timothy, the apostle Paul listed qualities to be pursued, and each time, he mentioned "righteousness" first. (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22) Moreover, in other passages the Bible repeatedly encourages us to pursue righteousness. (Prov. 15:9; 21:21; Isa. 51:1) A way to start to do so is by "taking in knowledge of . . . the only true God, and of the one whom [he] sent forth, Jesus Christ." (John 17:3) Pursuing righteousness will move a person to action—to repent of past sins and "turn around" so as to do God's will.—Acts 3:19.

⁵ Millions who are genuinely pursuing righteousness have dedicated their life to Jehovah and symbolized such dedication by water baptism. If you are now a baptized Christian, have you thought about the fact that your life course should, and likely does, reveal your ongoing pursuit of righteousness? One aspect of that is your discerning from the Bible what is "right and wrong"

3. How can we show appreciation for God's undeserved kindness?

4. Why can we be sure that the pursuit of "righteousness" is important, and what initial steps must a person take?

5. What must we do to gain and maintain a righteous standing with God?



Jesus warned against making a show of righteousness to impress men

when faced with life's decisions. (*Read Hebrews 5:14.*) For example, if you are a single Christian of marriageable age, are you completely resolved to avoid forming any romantic attachment to someone who is not a baptized Christian? You are if you are pursuing righteousness.—1 Cor. 7:39.

⁶ Being righteous is different from being self-righteous or "righteous overmuch." (Eccl. 7:16) Jesus warned against making a show of that sort of righteousness so as to appear better than others. (Matt. 6:1) Truly pursuing righteousness involves the heart—the correcting of wrong thoughts, attitudes, motives, and desires. If we keep working at doing this, we are unlikely to commit serious sins. (*Read Proverbs 4:23; compare James 1:14, 15.*) Furthermore, Jehovah will bless us and help us in our pursuit of other important Christian qualities.

6. Truly pursuing righteousness involves what?

"Pursue . . . Godly Devotion"

⁷ Devotion involves being ardently dedicated and loyal. One Bible dictionary notes that the Greek word translated “godly devotion” describes “the good and careful cherishing of the fear of God.” The Israelites often failed to manifest such devotion, as seen by their disobedient acts even after God freed them from Egypt.

⁸ For thousands of years after the perfect man Adam sinned, the question could be raised, “Can any human display perfect godly devotion?” Over the centuries, no sinful human was able to live a life of perfect godly devotion. But in his own due time, Jehovah revealed the answer to this “sacred secret.” He transferred the life of his only-begotten heavenly Son to Mary’s womb to be born as a perfect human. Throughout his earthly life and including his humiliating death, Jesus showed what it means to be ardently dedicated and fully loyal to the true God. His prayers revealed his reverence for his loving heavenly Father. (Matt. 11:25; John 12:27, 28) Thus, Jehovah inspired Paul to speak of “godly devotion” in describing Jesus’ exemplary life course.—*Read 1 Timothy 3:16.*

⁹ In our sinful state, we cannot manifest perfect godly devotion. But we can pursue it. This calls on us to follow Christ’s model as closely as possible. (1 Pet. 2:21) Thus, we will not be like the hypocrites who ‘have a form of godly devotion but prove false to its power.’ (2 Tim. 3:5) This does not mean that true godly devotion has nothing to do with outward appearances. It certainly does. For instance, whether we are choosing a wedding dress or deciding what to wear while shopping, our appearance should always harmonize with our claim “to reverence God.”

7. What is “godly devotion”?
8. (a) Adam’s sin raised what question? (b) How was the answer to this “sacred secret” revealed?
9. How can we pursue godly devotion?

We can pursue faith by meditating on the truths of God’s Word

nize with our claim “to reverence God.” (1 Tim. 2:9, 10) Yes, the pursuit of godly devotion requires that we take God’s righteous standards into consideration in our daily lives.

"Pursue . . . Faith"

¹⁰ *Read Romans 10:17.* To attain and maintain strong faith, a Christian must keep meditating on the precious truths found in God’s Word. “The faithful and discreet slave” has provided many fine publications. Three exceptional books are *The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived*, *Learn From the Great Teacher*, and *Come Be My Follower*, volumes that are designed to help us get to know Christ better and thus be in a position to imitate him. (Matt. 24:45-47) The slave class also arranges for meetings, assemblies, and conventions, many of which highlight “the word about Christ.” Do you see any ways in which you could take greater advantage of these as you pay “more than the usual attention” to what God provides?—Heb. 2:1.

¹¹ Prayer is another aid in building strong faith. Jesus’ followers once pleaded with

10. What must we do to keep our faith strong?
11. Prayer and obedience play what roles in our pursuing faith?



him: "Give us more faith." We can humbly beg God to do the same. (Luke 17:5) To that end, we should pray for the help of God's holy spirit; faith is one aspect of "the fruitage of the spirit." (Gal. 5:22) Further, obeying God's commands strengthens our faith. For instance, we might apply ourselves to having an increased share in the preaching work. That will likely produce in us a deep happiness. And as we reflect on the blessings that come from "seeking first the kingdom and [God's] righteousness," our faith will grow.—Matt. 6:33.

"Pursue . . . Love"

¹² Read 1 Timothy 5:1, 2. Paul gave practical counsel on how Christians can show love for one another. Our godly devotion must include obedience to Jesus' new commandment to "love one another" as he loved us. (John 13:34) The apostle John pointed out: "Whoever has this world's means for supporting life and beholds his brother having need and yet shuts the door of his tender compassions upon him, in what way does the love of God remain in him?" (1 John 3:17) Can you think of occasions when you have displayed love in a practical way?

¹³ Another way in which we pursue love

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- 12, 13. (a) What is Jesus' new commandment? (b) In what important ways must we pursue Christ-like love?

Thoughts for Meditation

- What is involved in pursuing righteousness and godly devotion?
- What will help us to pursue faith and endurance?
- How should love affect our dealings with one another?
- Why do we need to pursue mildness and peace?

is by being forgiving, not nursing grudges against our brothers. (*Read 1 John 4:20*) Rather, we want to follow this inspired counsel: "Continue putting up with one another and forgiving one another freely if anyone has a cause for complaint against another. Even as Jehovah freely forgave you, so do you also." (Col. 3:13) Is there someone in the congregation toward whom you could apply this counsel? Will you forgive him or her?

"Pursue . . . Endurance"

¹⁴ It is one thing to exert ourselves toward a short-term goal but quite another matter when the goal is difficult to reach or further away than we expected. Clearly, pursuing the goal of everlasting life requires endurance. "Because you kept what I said about endurance, I will also keep you from the hour of test," the Lord Jesus told the congregation in Philadelphia. (Rev. 3:10; ftn.) Indeed, Jesus taught about the need for endurance—a quality that helps us not to give up when facing trials and temptations. The brothers in the first-century congregation in Philadelphia must have shown exemplary endurance through many tests of faith. Thus, Jesus assured them of further help during a greater test to come.—Luke 16:10.

¹⁵ Jesus knew that his followers would face hatred from unbelieving relatives and the world in general, so on at least two occasions, he encouraged them in this way: "He that has endured to the end is the one that will be saved." (Matt. 10:22; 24:13) Jesus also showed how at that time his disciples could get the needed strength to endure. In one illustration, he likened rocky soil to individuals who "receive [God's] word with joy" but fall away when faced with tests of faith. However, he likened his faithful followers to

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14. What can we learn from the congregation in Philadelphia?
15. What did Jesus teach about endurance?



We can pursue love and mildness of temper

fect example in this. "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 Pet. 2:23) We cannot expect to do as well as Jesus did in this regard, but can we work at improving the extent to which we show mildness of temper?

¹⁸ In imitation of Jesus, may

we be "always ready to make a defense" of our beliefs, "doing so together with a mild temper and deep respect." (1 Pet. 3:15) Yes, our having mildness of temper can prevent differences of opinion from escalating into heated arguments, both with people we meet in our ministry and with fellow believers. (2 Tim. 2:24, 25) Mildness is conducive to our enjoyment of peace. Perhaps that is why Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, listed "peace" among qualities to pursue. (2 Tim. 2:22; compare 1 Timothy 6:11.) Yes, "peace" is another quality that the Scriptures encourage us to pursue.—Ps. 34:14; Heb. 12:14.

¹⁹ We have touched on seven Christian qualities that we are encouraged to pursue—righteousness, godly devotion, faith, love, endurance, mildness of temper, and peace. What a blessing it is in every congregation when brothers and sisters exert themselves to display even more fully these precious qualities! This will honor Jehovah and allow him to mold each of us to his praise.

"Pursue . . . Mildness of Temper" and Peace

¹⁷ No one enjoys being accused of something he has not said or done. Angry denial is a common way for humans to react to unjust criticism. How much better it is to show "mildness of temper"! (*Read Proverbs 15:1.*) It takes great strength to be mild when dealing with unjust criticism. Jesus Christ set a per-

16. What loving provision has helped millions to endure?

17. (a) Why is "mildness of temper" so important? (b) How did Jesus show that he was mild-tempered?

18. (a) What good does mildness of temper accomplish? (b) What other quality are we urged to pursue?

19. After considering seven Christian qualities, what are you determined to pursue, and why?

ARE YOU PREPARED TO DEFEND YOUR FAITH?

HAVE you ever faced a situation where you felt compelled to defend your faith? Consider what happened to Susana, a 16-year-old sister in Paraguay. In her high-school ethics class, a comment was made that Jehovah's Witnesses do not accept the "Old Testament," Jesus Christ, or Mary. It was also claimed that the Witnesses are fanatics who would rather die than accept medical care. How would you have reacted?

Susana prayed to Jehovah and raised her hand. The class was about to end, so she asked her teacher for permission to give a presentation about her beliefs as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. The teacher readily agreed. During the next two weeks, Susana prepared for the session, using the brochure entitled *Jehovah's Witnesses—Who Are They? What Do They Believe?*

The day for the presentation came. Susana explained the origin of the name Jehovah's Witnesses. She also explained our hope for the future and why we do not accept blood

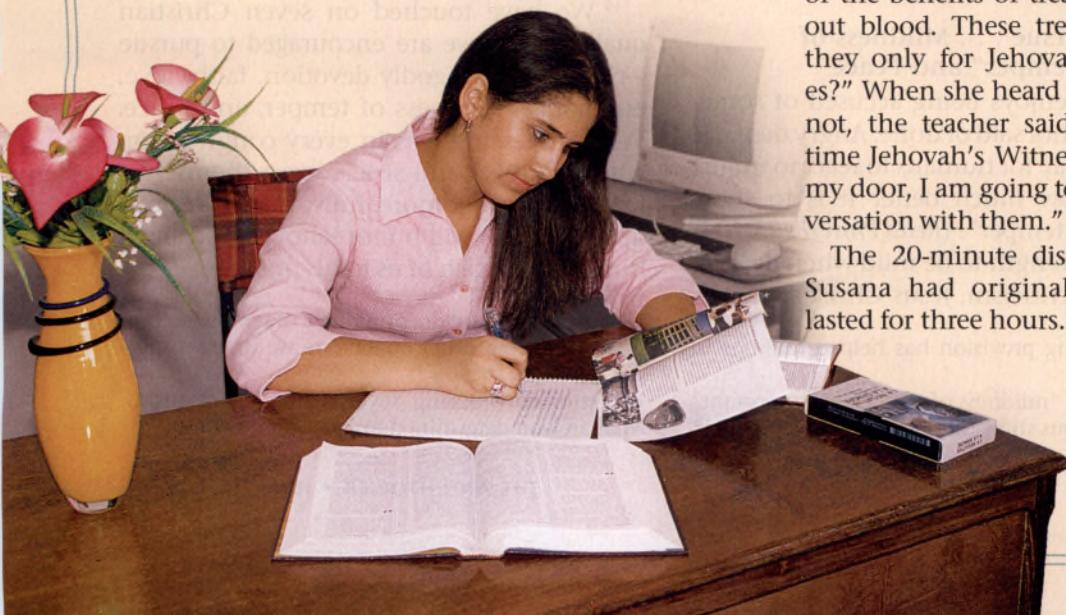
transfusions. Then she invited the class to ask questions. Most of the students raised their hands. The teacher was impressed with the young girl's Scriptural answers to the questions.

One student commented, "I was in a Kingdom Hall once, and there was not a single image." The teacher wanted to know why. Susana read Psalm 115:4-8 and Exodus 20:4. Amazed, the teacher said, "How is it that our churches are so filled with images when the Bible condemns them?"

The question-and-answer discussion continued for 40 minutes. When Susana asked the class if they wanted to see the video *No Blood—Medicine Meets the Challenge*, all answered yes. So the teacher scheduled another session the following day. After the video, Susana explained the alternative treatments that are acceptable to some of Jehovah's Witnesses. Regarding that, the teacher commented: "I did not know that there were so many alternative treatments; nor was I aware

of the benefits of treatment without blood. These treatments—are they only for Jehovah's Witnesses?" When she heard that they are not, the teacher said, "The next time Jehovah's Witnesses come to my door, I am going to have a conversation with them."

The 20-minute discussion that Susana had originally prepared lasted for three hours. A week later,

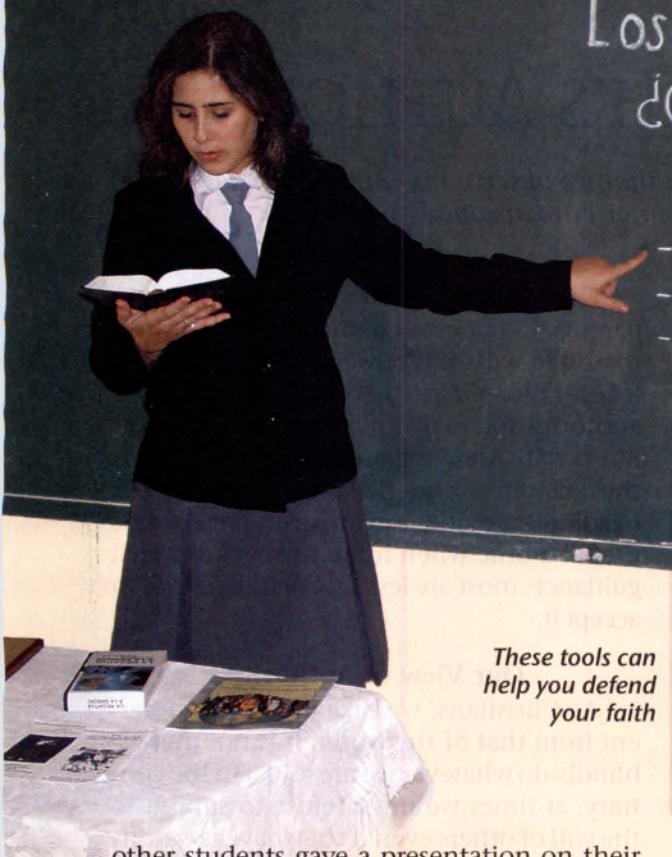


Los Testigos de Jehová

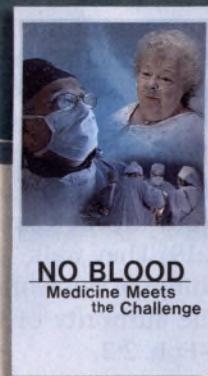
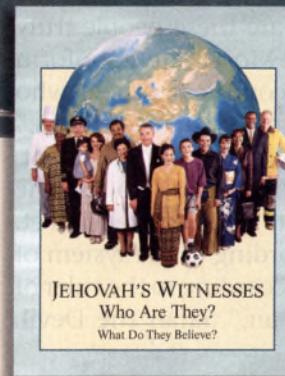
¿Quiénes son...

Y qué creen?

- Salmos 83:18
- Isaías 42:8
- 2 Timoteo 3:16



These tools can
help you defend
your faith



other students gave a presentation on their beliefs as church members. At the conclusion, many questions were raised, but the students involved could not defend their faith. The teacher asked them, "How is it that you are not able to defend your faith as did your fellow student who is one of Jehovah's Witnesses?"

The response was: "They really study the Bible. We do not."

Turning to Susana, the teacher said: "You really do study the Bible and make an effort to do what it says. You deserve commendation."

Susana could have remained silent. Yet, in speaking up, she followed the fine example of an unnamed little Israelite girl who was taken captive by the Syrians. That girl came to be in the household of the Syrian general Naaman, who had a loathsome skin disease.

The Israelite girl spoke up, saying to her mistress: "If only my lord were before the prophet that is in Samaria! In that case he would recover him from his leprosy." The girl just could not hold herself back from witnessing about the true God. This led to her owner, Naaman, becoming a worshipper of Jehovah.
—2 Ki. 5:3, 17.

Likewise, Susana could not keep herself from witnessing about Jehovah and his people. In taking the initiative to defend her faith when her beliefs were challenged, Susana was obeying the Scriptural command: "Sanctify the Christ as Lord in your hearts, always ready to make a defense before everyone that demands of you a reason for the hope in you, but doing so together with a mild temper and deep respect." (1 Pet. 3:15) Are you ready to defend your faith and take the initiative when the opportunity arises?

ACCEPT JEHOVAH'S AUTHORITY

"This is what the love of God means, that we observe his commandments; and yet his commandments are not burdensome."—1 JOHN 5:3.

AUTHORITY" is not a popular word today. Many would consider distasteful the idea of submitting to the will of another person. "No one tells me what to do" expresses the attitude of those who claim to be nonconformists. Yet, are these people truly independent? Hardly! Most merely conform to the standards of countless others who are "fashioned after this system of things." (Rom. 12:2) Far from being independent, they are "slaves of corruption," to use the words of the Christian apostle Peter. (2 Pet. 2:19) They walk "according to the system of things of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air," Satan the Devil. —Eph. 2:2.

1, 2. (a) Why is the idea of submission to authority distasteful to many today? (b) Are those who claim to be nonconformists truly independent? Explain.

² One author boasted: "I do not endow my parents or a priest or a minister or a guru or the Bible with the power to decide what is true for me." Granted, some may abuse their authority and may not merit our obedience. But is flatly denying any need for direction the answer? A brief glance at newspaper headlines provides a grim answer. It is tragic that at a time when humans so sorely need guidance, most are less inclined than ever to accept it.

Our View of Authority

³ As Christians, we take a position different from that of the world. It is not that we blindly do whatever we are told. On the contrary, at times we must refuse to submit to the will of others even if they have positions

3. How did first-century Christians show that they did not blindly submit to human authority?

"We must obey God as ruler rather than men"



of authority. This was also true of first-century Christians. For instance, when the apostles were ordered to stop preaching, they did not cave in to the high priest and other authority figures who were part of the Sanhedrin. They did not abandon right conduct in order to conform to human authority.—*Read Acts 5:27-29.*

⁴ Numerous servants of God in the pre-Christian era acted with similar resolve. For example, Moses “refused to be called the son of the daughter of Pharaoh, choosing to be ill-treated with the people of God,” even though doing so incurred “the anger of the king.” (Heb. 11:24, 25, 27) Joseph resisted the advances of Potiphar’s wife, who had the power to retaliate and cause him harm. (Gen. 39:7-9) Daniel “determined in his heart that he would not pollute himself with the delicacies of the king,” though his position on the matter was not easy for the principal court official of Babylon to accept. (Dan. 1:8-14) Such examples show that, historically, God’s people have taken a firm stand for what is right, regardless of the consequences. They did not give in to men simply to curry favor with them; neither should we.

⁵ Our courageous stand is not to be confused with mere stubbornness; nor are we like some who rebel just to make a political point. Rather, we are determined to accept Jehovah’s authority over that of any human. When man’s law conflicts with God’s law, the decision as to what we will do is not difficult. Like the apostles in the first century, we obey God as ruler rather than men.

⁶ What has helped us to accept God’s au-

4. What examples from the Hebrew Scriptures show that many of God’s people followed an unpopular course?

5. How is our view of authority different from that of the world?

6. Why is it always best to obey Jehovah’s commands?

uthority? We adopt the position stated at Proverbs 3:5, 6: “Trust in Jehovah with all your heart and do not lean upon your own understanding. In all your ways take notice of him, and he himself will make your paths straight.” We believe that anything God requires of us will ultimately work to our good. (*Read Deuteronomy 10:12, 13.*) Indeed, Jehovah described himself to the Israelites as “the One teaching you to benefit yourself, the One causing you to tread in the way in which you should walk.” Then he added: “O if only you would actually pay attention to my commandments! Then your peace would become just like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea.” (Isa. 48:17, 18) We trust those words. We are convinced that it is always in our best interests to obey God’s commands.

⁷ We accept Jehovah’s authority and obey him even if we do not fully understand the reason for some requirement set out in his Word. This is not credulity; it is trust. It reflects heartfelt confidence that Jehovah knows what is good for us. Our obedience is also an expression of our love, for the apostle John wrote: “This is what the love of God means, that we observe his commandments.” (1 John 5:3) But there is another aspect of our obedience that we should not overlook.

Training Our Perceptive Powers

⁸ The Bible tells us that we should have our “perceptive powers trained to distinguish both right and wrong.” (Heb. 5:14) Hence, our goal is not to obey God’s laws in a mechanical fashion; rather, we want to be able to “distinguish both right and wrong” based

7. What should we do if we do not fully understand a command set forth in God’s Word?

8. How is having our “perceptive powers trained” related to accepting Jehovah’s authority?

on Jehovah's standards. We want to see the wisdom of Jehovah's ways, so that we can say as did the psalmist: "Your law is within my inward parts."—Ps. 40:8.

⁹ To appreciate God's laws as the psalmist did, we need to meditate on what we read in the Bible. For example, when we learn about a certain requirement of Jehovah, we might ask: 'Why is this command or principle wise? Why is it in my best interests to obey? What bad consequences have befallen those who have ignored God's counsel in this matter?' When our conscience is thus attuned to Jehovah's ways, we are more likely to make decisions that are in harmony with his will. We are able to "go on perceiving what the will of Jehovah is" and then follow through by a course of obedience. (Eph. 5:17) This is not always easy.

Satan Seeks to Undermine God's Authority

¹⁰ Satan has long sought to undermine God's authority. His independent spirit is manifest in many ways. Take, for example, the lack of regard for the divine institution of marriage. Some opt to live together, while others scheme to be freed from their spouse. Those of either group might agree with a well-known actress who asserted: "Monogamy is impossible for both sexes." She added: "I don't know anyone who's faithful or wants to be." Reflecting on his own failed relationships, a popular actor similarly stated: "I'm not sure if it really is in our nature to be with someone for the rest of our lives." We would do well to ask ourselves, 'Do I accept Jehovah's authority in the matter of marriage, or has the world's lax attitude affected my thinking?'

9. How can we attune our conscience to Jehovah's standards, and why is it important that we do so?
10. What is one area in which Satan has sought to undermine God's authority?



It is always wise to follow God's standards

¹¹ Are you a youth in Jehovah's organization? If so, you may be a special target of Satan's attempts to undermine Jehovah's authority. "The desires incidental to youth" coupled with pressure from your peers may incline you to conclude that God's laws are burdensome. (2 Tim. 2:22) Do not let that happen. Strive to see the wisdom of God's standards. For example, the Bible tells you to "flee from fornication." (1 Cor. 6:18) Here again, ask yourself these questions: 'Why is that command wise? How will obedience in this matter benefit me?' You may know some who ignored God's counsel and then paid a heavy price for that error. Are they really happy now? Do they have a better life than the one they enjoyed in association with Jehovah's organization? Have they really found some secret to happiness that the rest of God's servants have missed?
—Read *Isaiah 65:14*.

¹² Consider the comments made some time ago by a Christian named Sharon: "Because of disregarding Jehovah's law, I have contracted the deadly disease AIDS. I often

- 11, 12. (a) Why may it be hard for youths to accept Jehovah's authority? (b) Relate an experience showing the folly of disregarding Jehovah's laws and principles.

look back at the many happy years I had in serving Jehovah." She recognized that it was foolish to break Jehovah's laws and that she should have treated them with the greatest respect. Jehovah's laws are for our own protection. Sharon died just seven weeks after writing the above words. As her tragic experience shows, Satan has nothing good to offer those who become part of this wicked system. As "the father of the lie," he makes many promises, but they fall flat, just as did the one he made to Eve. (John 8:44) Truly, it is always best to accept Jehovah's authority.

Guard Against an Independent Spirit

¹³ In accepting Jehovah's authority, we need to guard against an independent spirit. A haughty attitude can cause us to feel that we do not need guidance from anyone. For example, we might resist counsel given by those taking the lead among God's people. God has established an arrangement by which a faithful and discreet slave class provides spiritual food at the proper time. (Matt. 24:45-47) We should humbly recognize that this is the way Jehovah is caring for his people today. Be like the faithful apostles. When some disciples were stumbled, Jesus asked the apostles: "You do not want to go also, do you?" Peter replied: "Lord, whom shall we go away to? You have sayings of everlasting life."—John 6:66-68.

¹⁴ Accepting Jehovah's authority involves responding to counsel based on his Word. For example, the faithful and discreet slave class has been admonishing us to "stay awake and keep our senses." (1 Thess. 5:6) Such counsel is very appropriate during these last days in which many are "lovers of themselves, lovers of money." (2 Tim. 3:1, 2) Could we be affected by such prevailing atti-

13. What is one area in which we need to guard against an independent spirit?

14, 15. Why should we humbly submit to Bible counsel?

tudes? Yes. Nonspiritual goals could lull us into spiritual sleep, or we might adopt a materialistic attitude. (Luke 12:16-21) Hence, how wise it is to accept the Bible's counsel and avoid the self-serving lifestyle that is so prevalent in Satan's world!—1 John 2:16.

¹⁵ Spiritual food from the faithful and discreet slave class is disseminated to local congregations by appointed elders. The Bible admonishes us: "Be obedient to those who are taking the lead among you and be submissive, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will render an account; that they may do this with joy and not with sighing, for this would be damaging to you." (Heb. 13:17) Does this mean that congregation elders are infallible? Of course not! God sees their imperfections more clearly than any human can. Still, he expects us to be submissive. Cooperating with the elders, even though they are imperfect, gives evidence that we accept Jehovah's authority.

The Importance of Humility

¹⁶ We must always remember that Jesus is the true Head of the congregation. (Col. 1:18) That is one reason why we humbly submit to the direction of appointed elders,

16. How can we show respect for Jesus as Head of the Christian congregation?

Do You Recall?

- What does accepting Jehovah's authority involve?
- How is training our perceptive powers related to accepting Jehovah's authority?
- In what areas does Satan try to undermine God's authority?
- Why is humility important in accepting Jehovah's authority?

giving them "more than extraordinary consideration." (1 Thess. 5:12, 13) Of course, congregation elders can show that they too are submissive by being careful to convey to the congregation God's message, not their own opinions. They "do not go beyond the things that are written" in order to promote some personal idea.—1 Cor. 4:6.

¹⁷ All in the congregation need to be on guard against searching out their own glory. (Prov. 25:27) Evidently, that was a pitfall for one particular disciple whom the apostle John encountered. He wrote: "Diotrephes, who likes to have the first place among them, does not receive anything from us with respect. That is why, if I come, I will call to remembrance his works which he goes on doing, chattering about us with wicked words." (3 John 9, 10) There is a lesson in that even for us today. We have good reason

17. Why is an ambitious spirit dangerous?

to uproot any trace of ambition we might see in ourselves. The Bible tells us: "Pride is before a crash, and a haughty spirit before stumbling." Those who accept God's authority must resist the snare of presumptuousness, for doing otherwise will lead to disonor.—Prov. 11:2; 16:18.

¹⁸ Yes, make it your aim to resist the world's spirit of independence and to accept Jehovah's authority. From time to time, meditate appreciatively on the great privilege you have to serve Jehovah. The fact that you are among God's people is evidence that he has drawn you by means of his holy spirit. (John 6:44) Never take your standing with God for granted. Strive in all aspects of life to show that you reject an independent spirit and that you accept Jehovah's authority.

18. What will help us to accept Jehovah's authority?

KEEP "THE LOVE YOU HAD AT FIRST"

"Keep on holding fast what you have."—REV. 3:11.

DO YOU remember when you first learned about the wonderful prospect that Jehovah offers to obedient mankind? If you formerly practiced another religion, how did you feel when God's purposes were explained to you in the light of Scripture or when teachings that were once difficult to understand were clarified? Perhaps you realized that you had been misled. But how you

1, 2. How did you feel when you became convinced that what you were learning about Jehovah was the truth?

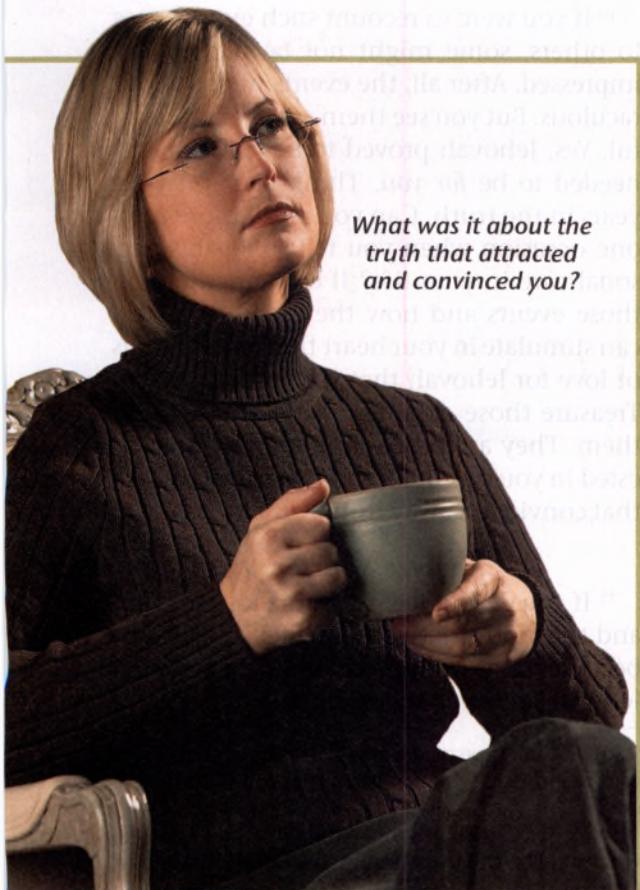
rejoice now that you have been enlightened! If you were raised by Christian parents, do you recall how you felt when you became convinced that what you were learning about Jehovah was the truth and you decided to live in harmony with it?—Rom. 12:2.

² Many of your spiritual brothers will tell you that they felt elated, close to Jehovah, and grateful that he had drawn them. (John 6:44) Their happiness moved them to share in Christian activities. They were so full of

joy that they wanted to share what they felt with everyone. Did you have a similar experience?

³ When addressing the first-century Christian congregation in Ephesus, Jesus spoke of "the love you had at first." The Ephesians had many good qualities, yet the love they once manifested for Jehovah had waned. Hence, Jesus told them: "I know your deeds, and your labor and endurance, and that you cannot bear bad men, and that you put those to the test who say they are apostles, but they are not, and you found them liars.

3. What situation existed in the Ephesian congregation when Jesus sent them a message?



You are also showing endurance, and you have borne up for my name's sake and have not grown weary. Nevertheless, I hold this against you, that you have left the love you had at first."—Rev. 2:2-4.

⁴ Jesus' counsel to the Ephesians and to other congregations he addressed in the book of Revelation has been fitting in view of conditions that existed for a time among anointed Christians from 1914 on. (Rev. 1: 10) Yet, it is possible that even now some Christians may lose "the love [they] had at first" for Jehovah and for Christian truth. With that in mind, let us examine how by recalling and meditating on your own experiences, you can maintain, refresh, and build on the love and the zeal you first felt for God and the truth.

What Convinced You of the Truth?

⁵ Everyone who makes a dedication to Jehovah has first to "prove" to himself what is "the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom. 12:1, 2) In part, that involves learning Bible truth. What convinces one person that Jehovah's Witnesses teach the truth may differ from what convinces another. Some recall that a turning point came when they read the divine name in the Bible or when they understood what the true condition of the dead is. (Ps. 83:18; Eccl. 9:5, 10) What impressed others was the love among Jehovah's people. (John 13:34, 35) Still others reasoned on what it means to be no part of the world. They concluded that true Christians cannot share in the political controversies or the wars of any nation.—Isa. 2:4; John 6:15; 17:14-16.

4. Why is Jesus' message to the Ephesians relevant today?

5, 6. (a) Of what must each Christian convince himself? (b) What convinced you that Jehovah's Witnesses teach the truth? (c) What can help a person to refresh the love he had at first?

⁶ For many, these reasonings and others were what kindled their first love for God. Take the time to recall what convinced *you* of the truth. You are an individual with unique circumstances and characteristics, so your basic reasons for loving Jehovah and believing in his promises likely differ from those of others. In all likelihood, the same reasons are just as valid to you today as they were when you first learned about them. The truth has not changed. Hence, reviewing those thoughts and feelings can in a way renew and refresh your first love for the truth.—*Read Psalm 119:151, 152; 143:5.*

Build on Your Foundation

⁷ Perhaps much has changed in your life since you made your dedication to Jehovah. Your first love for the truth was important, but as time went by, you needed a deeper love to face new challenges that put your faith to the test. However, Jehovah sustained you. (1 Cor. 10:13) Thus, your experiences over the years are also precious to you. They have helped you to build on the love you had at first, and they constitute another way you can prove to yourself the good, acceptable will of God.—Josh. 23:14; Ps. 34:8.

⁸ To illustrate, consider the situation in which the Israelites found themselves when Jehovah stated his purpose to deliver them from slavery in Egypt. God identified himself to Moses, saying: “I shall prove to be what I shall prove to be.” (Ex. 3:7, 8, 13, 14) In effect, Jehovah was saying that he would take on any role necessary to free his people. In the events that followed and as circumstances required, the Israelites saw Jehovah reveal different facets of his personality—as

7. Why do we need to build on our first love for the truth, and how can we do so?

8. How did Jehovah identify himself to Moses, and how did the Israelites come to know God more intimately?

the Almighty, as a Judge, a Leader, a Deliverer, a Warrior, and a Provider.—Ex. 12:12; 13:21; 14:24-31; 16:4; Neh. 9:9-15.

⁹ Your situation differs from that of the ancient Israelites. Even so, you have likely had experiences that convinced you of God’s personal interest in you, which strengthened your faith. Perhaps Jehovah proved himself to be in some way a Provider, a Comforter, or a Teacher. (*Read Isaiah 30:20b, 21.*) Or you may have sensed a clear answer to a prayer. You might have been facing a challenge, and then a fellow Christian provided help. Or personal study may have brought appropriate scriptures to your attention.

¹⁰ If you were to recount such experiences to others, some might not be particularly impressed. After all, the events were not miraculous. But you see them as very meaningful. Yes, Jehovah proved to be just what he needed to be *for you*. Think back on your years in the truth. Can you recall more than one occasion when you felt Jehovah’s personal care in your life? If so, remembering those events and how they made you feel can stimulate in your heart the same feelings of love for Jehovah that you felt back then. Treasure those experiences. Meditate upon them. They are proof that Jehovah is interested in you personally, and no one can take that conviction away from you.

Analyze Yourself

¹¹ If you do not feel the same love for God and the truth that you once felt, this is not because anything has changed on his part. Jehovah never changes. (Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17)

9, 10. What type of situation can help one come to know God, and why is it good to recall such experiences?

11, 12. If a Christian’s love for the truth has waned, what may be the cause, and what counsel did Jesus give?

He was interested in you back then, and he is as interested in you today as he ever was. So what, if anything, might have changed in your relationship with Jehovah? Could it be that you feel that you are under more pressure, more preoccupied with anxieties? Perhaps in the past you prayed more earnestly, studied more diligently, meditated more often. Were you more zealous in the ministry and regular at congregation meetings than you are now?—2 Cor. 13:5.

¹² You may not recognize any such tendencies in yourself, but if you do, what led to them? Could legitimate concerns, such as providing adequately for your family, caring for your health, or the like, have blunted your sense of urgency as to the nearness of Jehovah's day? Jesus told his apostles: "Pay attention to yourselves that your hearts never become weighed down with overeating and heavy drinking and anxieties of life, and suddenly that day be instantly upon you as a snare. For it will come in upon all those dwelling upon the face of all the earth. Keep awake, then, all the time making supplication that you may succeed in escaping all these things that are destined to occur." —Luke 21:34-36.

¹³ The inspired Bible writer James urged fellow believers to analyze themselves honestly in the light of God's Word. James wrote: "Become doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves with false reasoning. For if anyone is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, this one is like a man looking at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself, and off he goes and immediately forgets what sort of man he is. But he who peers into the perfect law that belongs to freedom and who persists in it, this man, because he has become, not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, will be happy in his doing it."—Jas. 1:22-25.

13. To what did James liken God's Word?



*Do you see things about yourself
that need to be adjusted?*

¹⁴ A person can use a mirror to make sure that he is presentable. For example, if a man sees that his tie is crooked, he can straighten it. If a woman sees that her hair is not neat, she can adjust it. Similarly, the Scriptures help us to examine what we are. When we compare ourselves with what the Bible says we should be, then we are using it as a mirror. But what would be the point of looking into a mirror if we did nothing to correct a defect we saw? We are wise if we *act* on the basis of what we see in God's "perfect law," becoming "doers" of it. Hence, any who perceive that their first love for Jehovah and the truth has waned would do well to ponder these questions: 'What pressures am I facing in life, and how am I reacting to them? How did I react in the past? Has something changed?' If such self-examination reveals any deficiencies, do not ignore them. If adjustments are needed, by all means make them without delay.—Heb. 12:12, 13.

14, 15. (a) How can the Bible help you to improve your spiritual condition? (b) On what questions might you ponder?

¹⁵ Such meditation can also help you to set reasonable goals for spiritual growth. The apostle Paul gave inspired counsel to his fellow worker Timothy for improving his ministry. Paul urged the younger man: “Ponder over these things; be absorbed in them, that your advancement may be manifest to all persons.” We too would do well to ponder, in the light of God’s Word, what advancement it is possible for us to make.—1 Tim. 4:15.

¹⁶ Any honest self-examination is bound to reveal some weaknesses. That could make one feel downhearted, but do not allow that to happen to you. After all, the objective of self-examination is to identify where improvement can be made. Satan, of course, would like a Christian to feel worthless because of his imperfections. In fact, the assertion has been made that God despises all efforts to serve him. (Job 15:15, 16; 22:3) That is a lie that Jesus vigorously contested; God considers each one of us precious. (*Read Matthew 10:29-31.*) An awareness of your imperfections should instead make you humbly resolved to do better, with Jehovah’s help. (2 Cor. 12:7-10) If illness or age are factors that limit what you can do, then set goals that are reasonable, but do not give up or let your love wane.

16. To what danger do you need to be alert when examining yourself in the light of the Scriptures?

How Would You Answer?

- How can your reasons for coming to love Jehovah be a source of encouragement to you now?
- Reflecting on your own experiences through the years can convince you of what?
- Why should you analyze your love for God?

Much for Which to Be Grateful

¹⁷ Great benefits are to be had from continuing to build on the foundation of the love you had at first. You can deepen your knowledge of God and your appreciation for his loving guidance. (*Read Proverbs 2:1-9; 3:5, 6.*) “In the keeping of [Jehovah’s judicial decisions] there is a large reward,” said the psalmist. “The reminder of Jehovah is trustworthy, making the inexperienced one wise.” Moreover, “happy are the ones faultless in their way, the ones walking in the law of Jehovah.” —Ps. 19:7, 11; 119:1.

¹⁸ You will surely agree that you have many good things for which to be grateful. You understand the reasons behind what is going on in the world. You benefit from the spiritual care and attention that God is giving to his people today. No doubt you feel grateful, too, that Jehovah has drawn you to his worldwide congregation and has given you the privilege of being one of his Witnesses. Count your blessings! If you were to make a list of them, it would likely be a long one. Doing that every so often will undoubtedly help you to apply the admonition: “Keep on holding fast what you have.”—Rev. 3:11.

¹⁹ Meditating on how your faith has developed over the course of time is just one step that can help you to hold fast what you have. This journal has repeatedly drawn attention to other essentials to maintaining spiritual health. Among them are prayer, attendance at and participation in Christian meetings, and zealously engaging in the public ministry. These things can help you to continue renewing, refreshing, and building on the love that you had at first.—Eph. 5:10; 1 Pet. 3:15; Jude 20, 21.

17, 18. What benefits come from building on the love you had at first?

19. Apart from meditating on your relationship with God, what is essential to maintaining spiritual health?

Did Jesus Mean Hellfire?

SOME who believe the doctrine of hellfire point to Jesus' words recorded at Mark 9:48 (or verses 44, 46). He mentioned worms (or maggots) that do not die and fire that is not quenched. If someone asked you about those words, how would you respond?

Depending on the Bible version being used, the person might read verse 44, 46, or 48 because these verses read similarly in some versions.* The *New World Translation* reads: "If your eye makes you stumble, throw it away; it is finer for you to enter one-eyed into the kingdom of God than with two eyes to be pitched into Gehenna, where their maggot does not die and the fire is not put out."—Mark 9:47, 48.

In any case, some claim that Jesus' statement supports the view that after death the souls of the wicked suffer forever. For instance, a comment in the Spanish *Sagrada Biblia* of the University of Navarre says: "Our Lord uses [these words] to refer to the torments of hell. Often 'the worm that does not die' is explained as the eternal remorse felt by those in hell; and the 'fire which is not quenched,' as their physical pain."

However, compare Jesus' words with the final verse of Isaiah's prophecy.[#] Is it not apparent that Jesus was alluding to the text in

* The most reliable Bible manuscripts do not include verses 44 and 46. Scholars acknowledge that those two verses were likely later additions. Professor Archibald T. Robertson writes: "The oldest and best manuscripts do not give these two verses. They came in from the Western and Syrian (Byzantine) classes. They are a mere repetition of verse 48. Hence we [omit] the numbering 44 and 46 in our verses which are not genuine."

[#] "They will actually go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that were transgressing against me; for the very worms upon them will not die and their fire itself will not be extinguished, and they must become something repulsive to all flesh."—Isa. 66:24.

Isaiah chapter 66? The prophet there apparently refers to going out "of Jerusalem to the surrounding Hinnom Valley (Gehenna), where human sacrifice was once practiced (Jer 7:31) and which eventually became the city's refuse heap." (*The Jerome Biblical Commentary*) The symbolism at Isaiah 66:24 clearly is not that of people being tortured; it speaks of *carcasses*. What it refers to as not dying is worms—not live humans or immortal souls. What, then, is the import of Jesus' words?

Note the comment on Mark 9:48 in the Catholic work *El evangelio de Marcos. Análisis lingüístico y comentario exegético*, Volume II: "[The] phrase is taken from Isaiah (66,24). There the prophet shows the two ways corpses were usually destroyed: putrefaction and incineration . . . The juxtaposition in the text of maggots and fire reinforces the idea of destruction. . . . Both destructive forces are described as permanent ('is not quenched, does not die'): there is simply no way to escape them. In this image, the only survivors are the maggot and the fire—not man—and they both annihilate anything that falls within their power. Hence, this is not a description of everlasting torment, but one of total destruction which, as it prevents resurrection from occurring, is tantamount to final death. [Fire] is, then, a symbol of annihilation."

Anyone who knows that the true God is loving and just should be able to see how reasonable it is to understand Jesus' words in that way. He was not saying that the wicked will experience everlasting torment. Rather, they are at risk of total destruction that prevents resurrection from occurring.

Questions From Readers

The apostle Paul stated that 'all Israel would be saved.' (Rom. 11:26) Did he mean that at some point all Jews would be converted to Christianity?

No, that is not what Paul was saying. As a nation, the natural descendants of Abraham rejected Jesus as the Messiah. And in the years following Jesus' death, it became clear that there would be no wholesale conversion of Jews to Christianity. Still, Paul's statement that 'all Israel would be saved' was true. In what way?

Jesus said to the Jewish religious leaders of his day: "The kingdom of God will be taken from you and be given to a nation producing its fruits." (Matt. 21:43) Because the nation of Israel as a whole rejected Jesus, Jehovah would turn his attention to a new nation, a spiritual one. Paul called this nation "the Israel of God."—Gal. 6:16.

Other passages in the Christian Greek Scriptures establish that "the Israel of God" is made up of 144,000 spirit-anointed Christians. (Rom. 8:15-17; Rev. 7:4) That this group would include non-Jews is confirmed by Revelation 5:9, 10, which shows that anointed Christians come "out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation." The members of spiritual Israel were specially selected to be "a kingdom and priests . . . , and they are to rule as kings over the earth." Although Jehovah rejected Israel as a chosen nation, *individuals* could become reconciled to him. That was the case with the apostles and many other early Christians. Of course, such Jews, like all other humans, had to be bought with the blood of Jesus Christ.—1 Tim. 2:5, 6; Heb. 2:9; 1 Pet. 1:17-19.

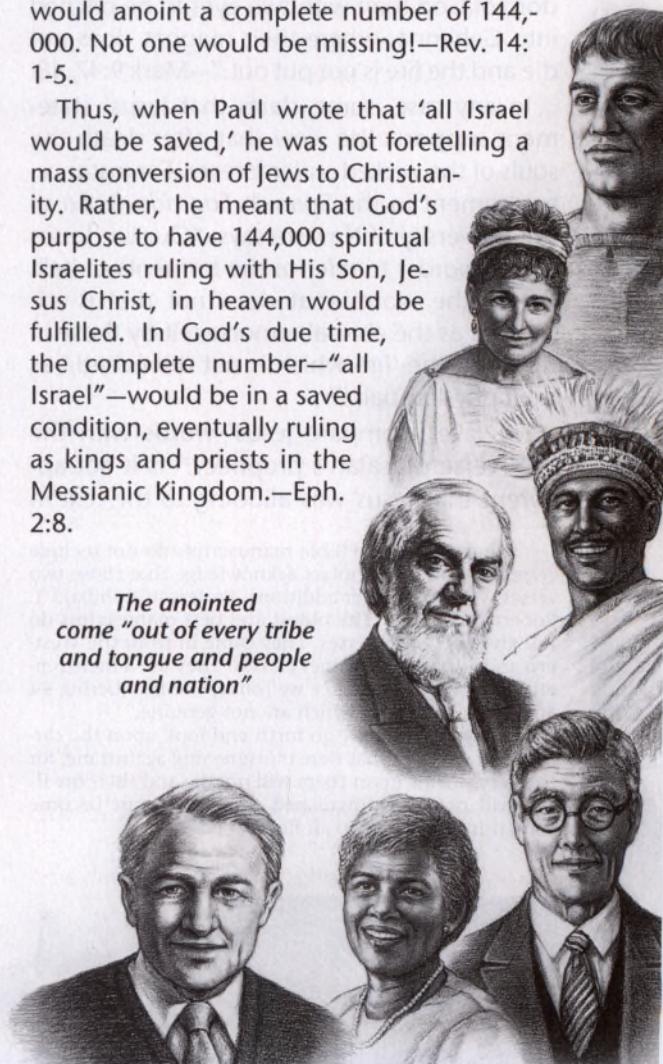
The fact that the majority of fleshly Jews in the first century lost out on the opportunity

to become corulers with Jesus did not thwart God's purpose. This could never be, for Jehovah stated through his prophet: "So my word that goes forth from my mouth will prove to be. It will not return to me without results, but it will certainly do that in which I have delighted, and it will have certain success in that for which I have sent it."—Isa. 55:11.

That is true with regard to God's purpose to install 144,000 corulers alongside his Son in heaven. The Bible makes clear that God would anoint a complete number of 144,000. Not one would be missing!—Rev. 14:1-5.

Thus, when Paul wrote that 'all Israel would be saved,' he was not foretelling a mass conversion of Jews to Christianity. Rather, he meant that God's purpose to have 144,000 spiritual Israelites ruling with His Son, Jesus Christ, in heaven would be fulfilled. In God's due time, the complete number—"all Israel"—would be in a saved condition, eventually ruling as kings and priests in the Messianic Kingdom.—Eph. 2:8.

*The anointed
come "out of every tribe
and tongue and people
and nation"*



Jehovah's Word Is Alive

Highlights From the Letter to the Romans

ABOUT 56 C.E., while on his third mission-journey, the apostle Paul arrives in the city of Corinth. He has come to know of differences in viewpoint between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome. Desiring to bring them into complete unity in the Christ, Paul takes the initiative to write them a letter.

In that letter to the Romans, Paul explains how humans are declared righteous and how such individuals should live. The letter enriches our mind with the knowledge of God and his Word, stresses God's undeserved kindness, and exalts Christ's role in our salvation.—Heb. 4:12.

DECLARED RIGHTEOUS—HOW? (Rom. 1:1–11:36)

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," writes Paul. "It is as a free gift that they are being declared righteous by [God's] undeserved kindness through the release by the ransom paid by Christ Jesus." Paul also says: "A man is declared righteous by faith apart from works of law." (Rom. 3:23, 24, 28) Through faith in "one act of justification," both anointed Christians and members of the "great crowd" of "other sheep" can be "declared righteous"—the former for life in heaven as joint heirs with Christ and the latter as God's friends, with a view to surviving "the great tribulation."—Rom. 5:18; Rev. 7:9, 14; John 10:16; Jas. 2:21-24; Matt. 25:46.

"Shall we commit a sin because we are not under law but under undeserved kindness?" asks Paul. "Never may that happen!" he answers. "You are slaves . . . , either of sin with death in view or of obedience with righteous-

ness in view," Paul explains. (Rom. 6:15, 16) "If you put the practices of the body to death by the spirit, you will live," he says.—Rom. 8:13.

Scriptural Questions Answered:

1:24-32—Did the degradation described here apply to the Jews or to the Gentiles? Although the description could fit either group, Paul was specifically referring to the apostate Israelites of old. Even though they knew God's righteous decree, "they did not approve of holding God in accurate knowledge." They were thus reprehensible.

3:24, 25—How could "the ransom paid by Christ Jesus" cover "the sins that occurred in the past" before it was paid? The first Messianic prophecy, recorded at Genesis 3:15, found fulfillment in 33 C.E. when Jesus was put to death on a torture stake. (Gal. 3:13, 16) The moment Jehovah uttered that prophecy, however, the ransom price was as good as paid from his viewpoint, for nothing can prevent God from fulfilling what he purposed. So on the basis of the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Jehovah could forgive the sins of descendants of Adam who exercised faith in that promise. The ransom also makes possible a resurrection of those of pre-Christian times.—Acts 24:15.

6:3-5—What is meant by baptism into Christ Jesus and baptism into his death? When Jehovah anoints followers of Christ with the holy spirit, they are united with Jesus and become members of the congregation that is the body of Christ, he being the Head. (1 Cor. 12:12, 13, 27; Col. 1:18) This is their baptism into Christ Jesus. Anointed

Christians are also “baptized into [Christ’s] death” in that they live a life of sacrifice and renounce any hope of everlasting life on earth. Their death, therefore, is a sacrificial one, as was Jesus’ death, though their death does not have ransoming value. This baptism into Christ’s death is completed when they die and are resurrected to life in heaven.

7:8-11—How did ‘sin receive inducement through the commandment?’ The Law helped people to realize the full range, or scope, of sin, making them more conscious of being sinners. Consequently, they saw themselves as sinners in more ways, and more people were exposed as sinners. It can thus be said that sin received inducement through the Law.

Lessons for Us:

1:14, 15. We have a number of reasons to declare the good news with eagerness. One of them is that we are debtors to people purchased with the blood of Jesus and are under obligation to help them spiritually.

1:18-20. People who are ungodly and unrighteous are “inexcusable,” for God’s invisible qualities are made evident in creation.

2:28; 3:1, 2; 7:6, 7. Paul follows up statements that may appear derogatory to the Jews with softening remarks. This sets an example for us in handling delicate subjects with tact and skill.

3:4. When man’s word conflicts with what God says in his Word, we “let God be found true” by trusting in the message of the Bible and acting in harmony with God’s will. By having a zealous share in the Kingdom-preaching and disciple-making work, we can help others find God to be true.

4:9-12. Abraham’s faith was counted to him as righteousness long before he was circumcised at the age of 99. (Gen. 12:4; 15:6; 16:3; 17:1, 9, 10) In that powerful way, God

showed what makes a righteous standing with him possible.

4:18. Hope is an essential element of faith. Our faith is based on hope.—Heb. 11:1.

5:18, 19. By showing logically how Jesus bears a resemblance to Adam, Paul concisely explains how one man can “give his soul a ransom in exchange for many.” (Matt. 20:28) Logical reasoning and brevity are excellent teaching methods to imitate.—1 Cor. 4:17.

7:23. Such body members as our hands, legs, and tongue can ‘lead us captive to sin’s law,’ so we should guard against misusing them.

8:26, 27. When we are faced with situations so perplexing that we do not know what to pray for, “the spirit itself pleads for us.” Then Jehovah, the “Hearer of prayer,” accepts appropriate prayers recorded in his Word as coming from us.—Ps. 65:2.

8:38, 39. Calamities, wicked spirit creatures, and human governments cannot make Jehovah stop loving us; neither should they make us stop loving him.

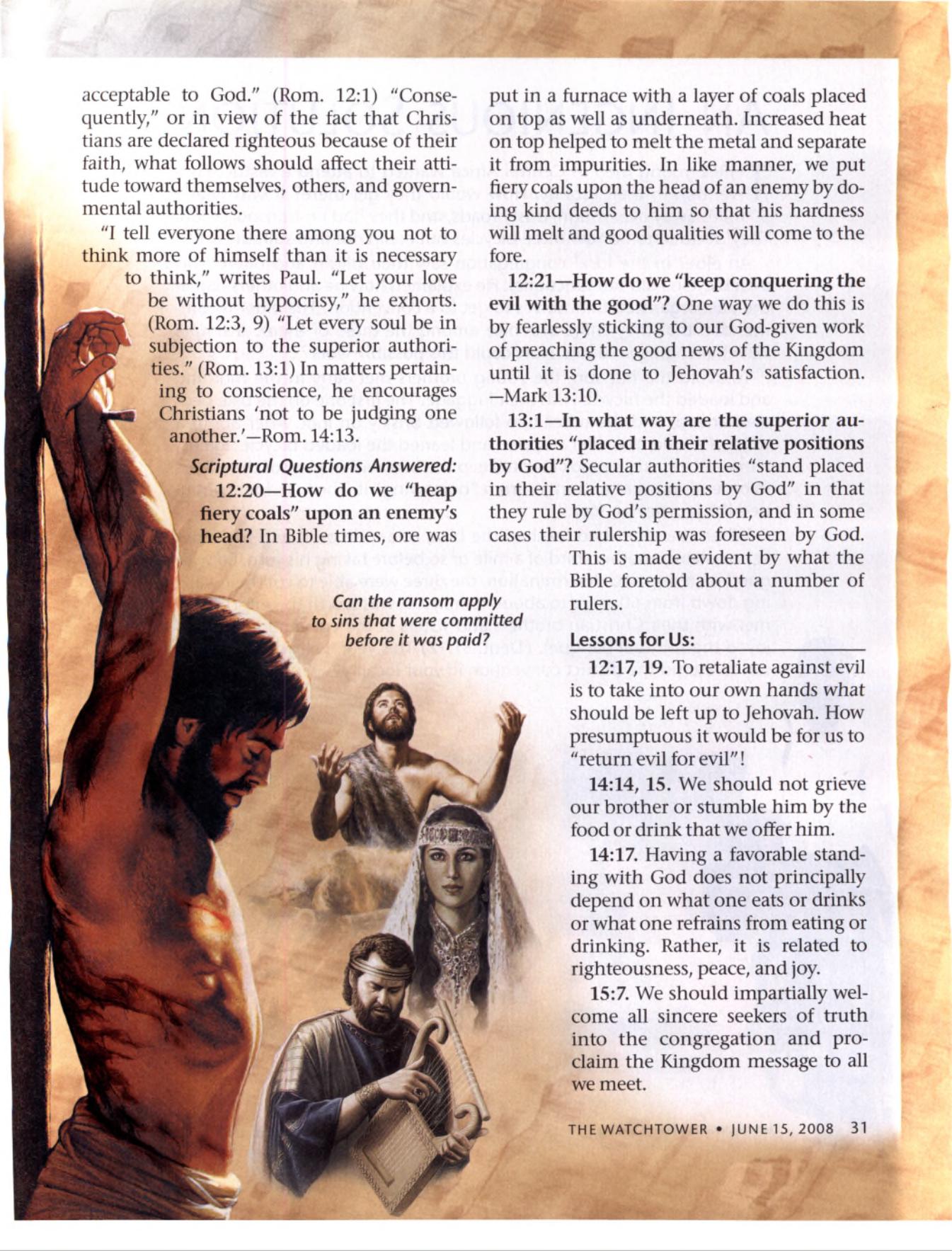
9:22-28; 11:1, 5, 17-26. Many prophecies concerning Israel’s restoration are fulfilled by the congregation of anointed Christians, whose members are “called not only from among Jews but also from among nations.”

10:10, 13, 14. Along with love for God and our fellow man, strong faith in Jehovah and his promises can motivate us to have a zealous share in the Christian ministry.

11:16-24, 33. How beautifully balanced are “God’s kindness and severity”! Yes, “the Rock, perfect is his activity, for all his ways are justice.”—Deut. 32:4.

LIVING IN HARMONY WITH BEING DECLARED RIGHTEOUS (Rom. 12:1-16:27)

“Consequently I entreat you by the compassions of God, brothers,” says Paul, “to present your bodies a sacrifice living, holy,



acceptable to God.” (Rom. 12:1) “Consequently,” or in view of the fact that Christians are declared righteous because of their faith, what follows should affect their attitude toward themselves, others, and governmental authorities.

“I tell everyone there among you not to think more of himself than it is necessary

to think,” writes Paul. “Let your love be without hypocrisy,” he exhorts. (Rom. 12:3, 9) “Let every soul be in subjection to the superior authorities.” (Rom. 13:1) In matters pertaining to conscience, he encourages Christians ‘not to be judging one another.’—Rom. 14:13.

Scriptural Questions Answered:

12:20—How do we “heap fiery coals” upon an enemy’s head? In Bible times, ore was

*Can the ransom apply
to sins that were committed
before it was paid?*

put in a furnace with a layer of coals placed on top as well as underneath. Increased heat on top helped to melt the metal and separate it from impurities. In like manner, we put fiery coals upon the head of an enemy by doing kind deeds to him so that his hardness will melt and good qualities will come to the fore.

12:21—How do we “keep conquering the evil with the good”? One way we do this is by fearlessly sticking to our God-given work of preaching the good news of the Kingdom until it is done to Jehovah’s satisfaction. —Mark 13:10.

13:1—In what way are the superior authorities “placed in their relative positions by God”? Secular authorities “stand placed in their relative positions by God” in that they rule by God’s permission, and in some cases their rulership was foreseen by God.

This is made evident by what the Bible foretold about a number of rulers.

Lessons for Us:

12:17, 19. To retaliate against evil is to take into our own hands what should be left up to Jehovah. How presumptuous it would be for us to “return evil for evil”!

14:14, 15. We should not grieve our brother or stumble him by the food or drink that we offer him.

14:17. Having a favorable standing with God does not principally depend on what one eats or drinks or what one refrains from eating or drinking. Rather, it is related to righteousness, peace, and joy.

15:7. We should impartially welcome all sincere seekers of truth into the congregation and proclaim the Kingdom message to all we meet.

AN INGENIOUS SOLUTION

THREE young men in Central Africa wanted to attend a district convention in their locality. How would they get there? It was nearly 60 miles away over rough, dusty roads, and they had no transportation. They decided to borrow three bicycles but could not find suitable ones.

An elder in the local congregation saw their plight and offered his own bicycle—old but functional. He explained how he and others had in the past organized themselves to get to a convention. The elder recommended that they share one bike among the three of them. A simple but challenging solution. How could this possibly work?

To avoid the hot sun, the young brothers met early in the morning and loaded the bicycle with their luggage. The first one on the bike pedaled ahead, and the other two followed briskly on foot. After about a third of a mile, the rider stopped and leaned the loaded bicycle against a tree. Of course, he took care to keep the bike within view of the others in order to prevent a stranger from “borrowing” it. The first rider continued the journey on foot.

When the other two reached the bike, one rode on it and the other kept walking another third of a mile or so before taking his turn. So with good planning and determination, the three were able to cut their walking down from 60 miles to about 40 miles. It was worth the effort. They met with their Christian brothers and sisters at the convention and enjoyed the spiritual banquet. (Deut. 31:12) This year, will you do all you can to attend the district convention in your locality?

