

Jehovah's Witnesses and Family Life



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**“Clothe yourselves with love, for
it is a perfect bond of union.”**

—Colossians 3:14

Jehovah's Witnesses love their families. They believe that God created the family arrangement to be a source of happiness and fulfillment. Witnesses find that Bible principles are a key to building strong family ties.

RESPECT FOR MARRIAGE

God views marriage as a permanent bond of union between a man and a woman. (Matthew 19:4-6) Witness husbands consider themselves responsible before God to provide for their family materially and emotionally. The Bible instructs husbands and wives to love and respect each other and children to obey their parents. Witnesses in mixed-belief marriages likewise accept and respect their mate's freedom to manifest and to practice his or her religion. Differences in religious beliefs do not diminish the love, respect, and care that Witnesses show to their mates. Witnesses do not view separation or divorce as an easy way to settle discord. Verbal, emotional, or physical abuse is not tolerated. Bible principles have helped many couples to resolve marital problems.

Women in the Witness community play an important and dignified role

Witnesses have been recognized for their efforts to promote happy family life. The *Lexikon der Hamburger Religionsgemeinschaften* (English translation: *Lexicon of the Hamburg Religious Communities*, 1995) states that Witnesses reinforce “family and



JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES—FAMILIES

Researchers have observed that the practical application of Bible principles contributes to the stable family environment of Jehovah's Witnesses.

- A sociological study of Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow concluded: “Being one of Jehovah's Witnesses had a positive effect on marriage and family life and, from a moral and humanist standpoint, brought about a beneficial ‘healing’ of the emotional wounds suffered by victims of the global collapse of the family as a social institution. As for the value placed on family life, particularly on staying married for life while raising several children, the figures obtained during this study showed that the emphasis on family is unusually high for residents of the capital.”
- A researcher from the University of Lethbridge, Canada, studied social life in Zambia and concluded: “Jehovah's Witnesses experience greater success than members of other denominations in maintaining stable marital unions. . . . Their success represents a modified exchange relationship between husband and wife, who, in their newly discovered, nonthreatening, cooperative endeavors, have become accountable in their treatment of one another to a new figurehead, God. . . . Husband and wife are encouraged to be individuals with integrity. . . . This overriding demand for integrity cements marriage.”

marriage ties” and “strive to live according to Bible principles that encourage love, honesty, respect, diligence, self-discipline.”

RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS

Jehovah’s Witnesses see their children as precious gifts from God and take seriously their responsibility to care for their children’s physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. They strive to make their children feel loved and secure. Witness parents educate their children and teach them values with a view to equipping them for adult life and preparing them to be productive members of society. Jehovah’s Witnesses also publish Bible-based information to assist blended and single-parent families to be successful.

Witness parents know that the best gift they can give their children is their love and attention



JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES—PARENTING

“Jehovah’s Witnesses inculcate in their children high moral principles. They teach their children to avoid behavior, actions and even attitudes that, [while] considered in today’s world as normal, can be harmful to the children themselves and others. Therefore they warn their children about the dangers of using drugs, smoking and the abuse of alcohol. They recognize the importance of honesty and hard work. . . . Jehovah’s Witnesses teach their children moral qualities, to respect the authorities, other individuals and their property and to be law abiding citizens.”

*—The History of Religion in Ukraine,
edited by Professor Petro Yarotskyi*

BIBLE PRINCIPLES THAT BUILD STABLE FAMILIES

Husbands: “Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.”

Wives: “The wife should have deep respect for her husband.”

Parents: “Do not be irritating your children, but go on bringing them up in the discipline and admonition of Jehovah.”

Children: “‘Honor your father and your mother’ is the first command with a promise.”

—Ephesians 5:28–6:4



LEGAL PROVISIONS

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):

- Article 18.4 “The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents . . . to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.”

The following international and regional human rights instruments outline similar provisions:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26.3
- The American Convention on Human Rights, Article 12.4
- The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), Article 8, and the Protocol of the ECHR, Article 2
- The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, Article 18
- The ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, Articles 30.3 and 31

In the case of *Palau-Martinez v. France*, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that a mother who was one of Jehovah’s Witnesses had been discriminated against when she was denied custody of her children without due consideration of the evidence. Both children had lived with their mother for nearly three and a half years when an appellate court abruptly awarded custody to their father. The ECHR found that the court had treated the parents differently based solely on the mother’s religion.

