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PART 2 OF 4

Love and Justice in the Christian Congregation

“Go on carrying the burdens of one another, and in this way you will fulfill the law of the Christ.”—GAL. 6:2.

SONG 12

Great God, Jehovah

PREVIEW

This article and the two that follow are part of a series that discusses why we can be confident that Jehovah is a God of love and justice. He wants his people to receive justice, and he comforts those who have been deprived of it in this wicked world.

JEHOVAH GOD loves his worshippers. He always has, and he always will. He also loves justice. (Ps. 33:5) So we can be sure of two things: (1) It pains Jehovah when his servants are treated unfairly. (2) He will make sure that justice is served. In the first article in this series,* we learned that the Law that God gave Israel through Moses was built on love. It promoted justice—justice for all, even vulnerable ones. (Deut. 10:18) That Law reveals how deeply Jehovah cares about his worshippers.

² The Mosaic Law ended in 33 C.E. when the Christian congregation was established. Would Christians be without the benefits of a law that is built on love and promotes justice? By no means! Christians had a new law. In this article, we will first discuss what that law is. Then we will answer these questions: Why can we say that this law is built on love? Why can we say that it promotes justice? Under this law, how should those in authority treat others?

WHAT IS “THE LAW OF THE CHRIST”?

³ Read Galatians 6:2. Christians are under “the law

* See the article “Love and Justice in Ancient Israel” in the February 2019 issue of *The Watchtower*.

- 1. We can be sure of what two things?**
- 2. What questions will we answer?**
- 3. What is included in “the law of the Christ” mentioned at Galatians 6:2?**

of the Christ.” Jesus did not write down a law code for his followers, but he did give them instructions, commands, and principles to live by. “The law of the Christ” includes everything Jesus taught. To understand this law better, consider the following.

⁴ In what ways did Jesus teach? First, he taught people by what he said. His words had power because they conveyed the truth about God, taught the real meaning of life, and pointed to God’s Kingdom as the remedy for all human suffering. (Luke 24:19) Jesus also taught by example. By how he lived, he showed his followers how they should live.—John 13:15.

⁵ When did Jesus teach? He taught during his ministry on earth. (Matt. 4:23) He also taught his followers shortly after he was resurrected. For example, he appeared to a group of disciples—perhaps numbering over 500—and gave them the command to “make disciples.” (Matt. 28:19, 20; 1 Cor. 15:6) As head of the congregation, Jesus continued to instruct his disciples after he returned to heaven. For instance, about 96 C.E., Christ directed the apostle John to give encouragement and counsel to anointed Christians.—Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:1.

⁶ Where are Jesus’ teachings recorded? The four Gospels record many of the things Jesus said and

4-5. In what ways did Jesus teach, and when did he teach?

6-7. (a) Where are Jesus’ teachings recorded? (b) How do we obey the law of the Christ?

did on earth. The rest of the Christian Greek Scriptures—written by men who were inspired by holy spirit and who had “the mind of Christ”—further help us to understand Jesus’ thinking on matters.—1 Cor. 2:16.

⁷ *Lessons:* Jesus’ teachings cover all aspects of life. So the law of the Christ governs what we do at home, at work or at school, and in the congregation. We learn this law by reading the Christian Greek Scriptures and meditating on them. We obey this law by bringing our lives into harmony with the instructions, commands, and principles found in that inspired record. When we obey the law of the Christ, we are obeying our loving God, Jehovah, who is the Source of all that Jesus taught.—John 8:28.

A LAW BUILT ON LOVE

⁸ A well-made house built on a solid foundation makes those who live in it feel safe and secure. Similarly, a good law built on a solid foundation makes those who live by it feel safe and secure. The law of the Christ is built on the best possible foundation—love. Why can we say that?

⁹ First, *Jesus was motivated by love in everything he did.* Pity, or tender compassion, is an expression of

8. What is the foundation of the law of the Christ?

9-10. What examples show that Jesus was motivated by love, and how can we imitate him?

love. Moved by such pity, Jesus taught the crowds, healed the sick, fed the hungry, and raised the dead. (Matt. 14:14; 15:32-38; Mark 6:34; Luke 7:11-15) Although doing such things consumed much of his time and energy, Jesus willingly put the needs of others ahead of his own. Above all, he showed great love by surrendering his life in behalf of others.—John 15:13.

¹⁰ *Lessons:* We can imitate Jesus by putting the needs of others ahead of our own. We can also imitate him by cultivating tender compassion for people in our territory. When such compassion moves us to preach and teach the good news, we are obeying the law of the Christ.

¹¹ Second, *Jesus revealed his Father's love.* During his ministry, Jesus showed how deeply Jehovah cares about his worshippers. Among other things, Jesus taught the following: Each of us is valuable and precious to our heavenly Father. (Matt. 10:31) Jehovah is eager to welcome back a lost sheep who repents and returns to the congregation. (Luke 15:7, 10) Jehovah proved his love for us by giving his Son as a ransom in our behalf.—John 3:16.

¹² *Lessons:* How can we imitate Jehovah's love? (Eph. 5:1, 2) We view each of our brothers and sisters as valuable and precious, and we gladly welcome back “a

11-12. (a) What shows that Jehovah deeply cares about us?
(b) How can we imitate Jehovah's love?

lost sheep” who returns to Jehovah. (Ps. 119:176) We prove that we love our brothers and sisters by giving of ourselves, such as by helping them in times of need. (1 John 3:17) When we treat others in loving ways, we are obeying the law of the Christ.

¹³ Third, *Jesus commanded his followers to show self-sacrificing love.* (Read John 13:34, 35.) Jesus’ commandment is new because it calls for a kind of love that was not required under the Law that God gave Israel: Love fellow believers as Jesus loved you. That requires a self-sacrificing love.* We are to love our brothers and sisters even *more than* we love ourselves. We must love them to the point of being willing to give up our life for them, as Jesus did for us.

¹⁴ *Lessons:* How do we obey the new commandment? Put simply, by making sacrifices for our brothers and sisters. We are willing to make not just the ultimate sacrifice—giving up our life—but also smaller sacrifices. For example, when we regularly go out of our way to pick up an elderly brother or sister for a meeting,

* **EXPRESSION EXPLAINED:** A self-sacrificing love moves us to put the needs and interests of others ahead of our own. We are willing to give up something or deprive ourselves of something in order to help or benefit others.

13-14. (a) As recorded at John 13:34, 35, what did Jesus command his followers to show, and why is this a new commandment? (b) How do we obey the new commandment?

or we willingly give up our own preferences in order to please a loved one, or we take time off from secular work to help with disaster relief, we are obeying the law of the Christ. We are also helping to make our congregation a place where each individual can feel safe and secure.

A LAW THAT PROMOTES JUSTICE

¹⁵ “Justice,” as used in the Bible, basically means to do what God considers to be right and to do so without partiality. Why can we say that the law of the Christ promotes justice?

¹⁶ First, consider how Jesus’ *actions* revealed his

15-17. (a) How did Jesus’ actions reveal his sense of justice?
(b) How can we imitate Jesus?

When we deal lovingly with others,
we are obeying “the law of the Christ”

(See paragraphs 9-14)



sense of justice. In his day, the Jewish religious leaders hated non-Jews, despised common Jews, and disrespected women. Jesus, however, was fair and impartial in dealing with all. He accepted non-Jews who approached him in faith. (Matt. 8:5-10, 13) He preached without prejudice to all, rich and poor. (Matt. 11:5; Luke 19:2, 9) He was never harsh or abusive in his treatment of women. On the contrary, he was respectful and kind to women, including those whom others viewed with scorn.—Luke 7:37-39, 44-50.

¹⁷ *Lessons:* We can imitate Jesus by dealing impartially with others and preaching to all who are willing to listen—regardless of their social or religious background. Christian men follow his example by treating women with respect. When we do such things, we are obeying the law of the Christ.

¹⁸ Second, consider what Jesus *taught* about justice. He taught principles that would help his followers to treat others fairly. Think, for example, about the Golden Rule. (Matt. 7:12) We all want to be treated fairly. Therefore, we should behave fairly toward others. If we do, they may be moved to treat us with fairness. But what if we have been treated unjustly? Jesus also taught his followers to trust that Jehovah will “cause justice to be done for [those] who cry out to him day

18-19. What did Jesus teach about justice, and what lessons do we learn from his teaching?

and night.” (Luke 18:6, 7) That statement is, in effect, a promise: Our just God is aware of the trials we are facing in these last days, and he will cause justice to be done for us in his due time.—2 Thess. 1:6.

¹⁹ *Lessons:* When we follow the principles that Jesus taught, we will treat others in a just way. And if we have been a victim of injustice in Satan’s world, we can take comfort in knowing that Jehovah *will* cause justice to be done for us.

HOW SHOULD THOSE IN AUTHORITY TREAT OTHERS?

²⁰ Under the law of the Christ, how should those in authority treat others? Since love is the foundation of that law, those in authority must dignify those in their care and treat them in a loving way. They must remember that the way of Christ is the way of love.

²¹ *In the family.* A husband is to love his wife “as the Christ does the congregation.” (Eph. 5:25, 28, 29) A husband must imitate the self-sacrificing love of Christ by putting his wife’s needs and interests ahead of his own. Some men may find it difficult to show such love, perhaps because they were not raised in an environment where treating others fairly and lovingly was val-

20-21. (a) How should those in authority treat others? (b) How can a husband show self-sacrificing love, and how should a father treat his children?



Jesus was respectful and kind to women,
including those whom others viewed with scorn
(See paragraph 16)

ued. It may be difficult for them to unlearn bad habits, but they must make these changes in order to obey the law of the Christ. A husband who shows self-sacrificing love gains his wife’s respect. A father who truly loves his children would never abuse them by what he says or does. (Eph. 4:31) Instead, he expresses his love and approval in ways that make his children feel safe and secure. Such a father gains the love and trust of his children.

²² *In the congregation.* Elders must remember that the “sheep” do not belong to them. (John 10:16; read 1 Peter 5:1-3.) The expressions “flock of God,” “before

22. As stated at 1 Peter 5:1-3, to whom do the “sheep” belong, and how are they to be treated?

God,” and “God’s inheritance” remind elders that the sheep belong to Jehovah. He wants his sheep to be treated with love and tenderness. (1 Thess. 2:7, 8) Elders who lovingly carry out their responsibility as shepherds gain Jehovah’s approval. Such elders also gain the love and respect of their brothers and sisters.

²³ What is the role of elders in handling cases of serious wrongdoing? Their role is different from that of judges and elders under the Law that God gave Israel. Under that Law, appointed men handled not only spiritual matters but also civil and criminal cases. But under the law of the Christ, the elders’ role is to handle the spiritual aspects of the wrongdoing. They recognize that the secular authorities have the God-given responsibility to handle civil and criminal cases. That includes the authority to impose such penalties as fines or imprisonments.—Rom. 13:1-4.

²⁴ How do elders handle the spiritual aspects of serious wrongdoing? They use the Scriptures to weigh matters and make decisions. They keep in mind that love is the foundation of the law of the Christ. Love moves the elders to consider: What needs to be done to help any in the congregation who have been victims of the wrongdoing? Regarding the wrongdoer, love

23-24. (a) What is the role of elders in handling cases of serious wrongdoing? (b) When handling such cases, what concerns do elders have?

moves the elders to consider: Is he repentant? Can we help him to regain his spiritual health?

²⁵ How thankful we are to be under the law of the Christ! When all of us work hard to obey it, we help to make our congregation a place where each individual can feel loved, valued, and safe. Still, we are living in a world where “wicked men” have advanced “from bad to worse.” (2 Tim. 3:13) We must not let down our guard. How can the Christian congregation reflect God’s justice when dealing with child sexual abuse? The next article will answer that question.

25. What will the next article discuss?

PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS Page 8: Jesus observes a widow whose only son has died. Moved with pity, Jesus resurrects the young man.

Page 11: Jesus has a meal in the home of a Pharisee named Simon. A woman, perhaps a prostitute, has just washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and poured some oil on them. Simon disapproves of the woman’s actions, but Jesus defends her.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| ■ What is the foundation of the law of the Christ? | ■ What shows that the law of the Christ promotes justice? | ■ How should those in authority treat others? |
|--|---|---|

PART 3 OF 4

Love and Justice in the Face of Wickedness

*“You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness;
no one bad may remain with you.”—PS. 5:4.*

SONG 142

Holding Fast to Our Hope

PREVIEW

This article will consider how children can be kept safe from sexual abuse. We will learn how elders act in behalf of the congregation and how parents can protect their children.

JEHOVAH GOD hates all forms of wickedness. (Read Psalm 5:4-6.) How he must hate child sexual abuse—an especially repugnant wicked deed! In imitation of Jehovah, we as his Witnesses abhor child abuse and do not tolerate it in the Christian congregation.—Rom. 12:9; Heb. 12:15, 16.

² Any act of child abuse is absolutely opposed to “the law of the Christ”! (Gal. 6:2) Why can we say that? As we learned in the preceding article, the law of the Christ—that is, all that Jesus taught both by word and by example—is built on love and promotes justice. Governed by this law, true Christians treat children in a way that makes them feel safe and genuinely loved. But child abuse is a selfish, unjust act that makes a child feel unsafe and unloved.

³ Sadly, child sexual abuse is a worldwide plague, and true Christians have been affected by this plague. Why? “Wicked men and impostors” abound, and some may try to enter the congregation. (2 Tim. 3:13) In addition, some professing to be a part of the congregation have succumbed to perverted fleshly desires and have sexually abused children. Let us discuss why child abuse is such a grave sin. Then we will consider how elders handle instances of serious wrongdoing,

1-3. (a) According to Psalm 5:4-6, how does Jehovah feel about wickedness? (b) Why can we say that child abuse is opposed to “the law of the Christ”?

including child abuse, and how parents can protect their children.*

A GRAVE SIN

⁴ Child abuse has far-reaching consequences. It affects the victims as well as those who care about the victims—their family members and their Christian brothers and sisters. Child abuse is a grave sin.

⁵ *A sin against the victim.*[#] It is a sin to inflict unjust pain and suffering on others. As we will see in the next article, the child abuser does just that—he hurts the child in devastating ways. He betrays the child’s trust, robbing the child of his or her security. Children must be protected from such a wicked deed, and those who have been victimized by it need comfort and help. —1 Thess. 5:14.

* **EXPRESSIONS EXPLAINED:** **Child sexual abuse** occurs when an adult uses a child to satisfy his or her own sexual desires. It could include sexual intercourse; oral or anal sex; fondling of genitalia, breasts, or buttocks; or other perverted acts. While most **victims** are girls, many boys are abused as well. Although most **abusers** are men, some women also abuse children.

EXPRESSION EXPLAINED: In this article and in the one that follows, the word “**victim**” refers to someone who was sexually abused as a child. We use this term to make clear that the child has been hurt and taken advantage of and that he or she is innocent.

4-5. How is child abuse a sin against the victim?

⁶ *A sin against the congregation.* When someone who is a part of the congregation becomes guilty of child abuse, he brings reproach on the congregation. (Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12) How unfair that is to the millions of faithful Christians who are putting up “a hard fight for the faith”! (Jude 3) We do not tolerate in our midst individuals who unrepentantly commit wicked deeds and who bring reproach on the good name of the congregation.

⁷ *A sin against the secular authorities.* Christians are to “be in subjection to the superior authorities.” (Rom. 13:1) We prove our subjection by showing due respect for the laws of the land. If someone in the congregation becomes guilty of violating a criminal law, such as by committing child abuse, he is sinning against the secular authorities. (Compare Acts 25:8.) While the elders are not authorized to enforce the law of the land, they do not shield any perpetrator of child abuse from the legal consequences of his sin. (Rom. 13:4) The sinner reaps what he has sown.—Gal. 6:7.

⁸ *Above all, a sin against God.* (Ps. 51:4) When a

6-7. How is child abuse a sin against the congregation and against the secular authorities?

8. How does Jehovah view sins committed against humans?

human sins against another human, he also sins against Jehovah. Consider an example from the Law that God gave Israel. The Law said that a man who robbed or defrauded his neighbor was behaving “unfaithfully toward Jehovah.” (Lev. 6:2-4) Certainly, then, when an individual who is a part of the congregation abuses a child—robbing that child of his or her security—he is behaving unfaithfully toward God. The abuser brings great reproach on Jehovah’s name. For that reason, abuse must be condemned for what it is—a gross sin against God.

⁹ Over the years, Jehovah’s organization has provided an abundance of Scriptural information on the subject of child abuse. For example, articles in *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* have discussed how those who have been sexually abused can deal with emotional scars, how others can help and encourage them, and how parents can protect their children. Elders have received detailed Scriptural training on how to handle the sin of child abuse. The organization continues to review the way congregations handle the sin of child abuse. Why? To make sure that our way of handling the matter is in harmony with the law of the Christ.

9. What Scriptural information has Jehovah’s organization provided over the years, and why?

HANDLING INSTANCES OF SERIOUS WRONGDOING

¹⁰ When elders handle any matter involving serious wrongdoing, they keep in mind that the law of the Christ requires that they treat the flock with love and do what is right and just in God's eyes. As a result, they have a number of concerns when they receive a report of serious wrongdoing. The elders are primarily concerned with maintaining the sanctity of God's name. (Lev. 22:31, 32; Matt. 6:9) They are also deeply concerned with the spiritual welfare of their brothers and sisters in the congregation and want to help any who have been victims of wrongdoing.

¹¹ In addition, if the wrongdoer is a part of the congregation, elders are concerned with trying to restore him if that is possible. (Read James 5:14, 15.) A Christian who gives in to wrong desire and commits a serious sin is spiritually sick. This means that he no longer has a healthy relationship with Jehovah.* In

* Spiritual sickness is no excuse for gross sin. The sinner is fully responsible for his wrong choices and actions and is accountable to Jehovah. —Rom. 14:12.

10-12. (a) When they handle any matter involving serious wrongdoing, what do elders keep in mind, and what concerns do they have? (b) According to James 5:14, 15, what do the elders endeavor to do?

a sense, the elders are spiritual physicians. They endeavor to make “the sick one [in this instance, the wrongdoer] well.” Their Scriptural counsel can help him to restore his relationship with God, but this is only possible if he is genuinely repentant.—Acts 3:19; 2 Cor. 2:5-10.

¹² Clearly, elders have a weighty responsibility. They care deeply about the flock that God has entrusted to them. (1 Pet. 5:1-3) They want their brothers and sisters to feel secure in the congregation. For that reason, they act promptly when they receive a report of serious wrongdoing, including child abuse. Consider the questions that appear at the beginning of paragraphs 13, 15, and 17.

¹³ *Do elders comply with secular laws about reporting an allegation of child abuse to the secular authorities?* Yes. In places where such laws exist, elders endeavor to comply with secular laws about reporting allegations of abuse. (Rom. 13:1) Such laws do not conflict with God’s law. (Acts 5:28, 29) So when they learn of an allegation, elders immediately seek direction on how they can comply with laws about reporting it.

¹⁴ Elders assure victims and their parents and others with knowledge of the matter that they are free to

13-14. Do elders comply with secular laws about reporting an allegation of child abuse? Explain.

report an allegation of abuse to the secular authorities. But what if the report is about someone who is a part of the congregation and the matter then becomes known in the community? Should the Christian who reported it feel that he has brought reproach on God's name? No. The abuser is the one who brings reproach on God's name.

¹⁵ *In the congregation, before the elders take judicial action, why are at least two witnesses required?* This requirement is part of the Bible's high standard of justice. When there is no confession of wrongdoing, two witnesses are required to establish the accusation and authorize the elders to take judicial action. (Deut. 19: 15; Matt. 18:16; read 1 Timothy 5:19.) Does this mean that before an allegation of abuse can be reported to the authorities, two witnesses are required? No. This requirement does not apply to whether elders or others report allegations of a *crime*.

¹⁶ When they learn that someone in the congregation is accused of child abuse, elders endeavor to comply with any secular laws about reporting the matter, and then they conduct a Scriptural investigation. If the individual denies the accusation, the elders

15-16. (a) According to 1 Timothy 5:19, why are at least two witnesses required before the elders take judicial action? (b) What do elders do when they learn that someone in the congregation is accused of child abuse?

consider the testimony of witnesses. If at least two people—the one making the accusation and someone else who can verify this act or other acts of child abuse by the accused—establish the charge, a judicial committee is formed.* The absence of a second witness does not mean that the one making the accusation is untruthful. Even if a charge of wrongdoing cannot be established by two witnesses, the elders recognize that a serious sin may have been committed, one that deeply hurt others. The elders provide ongoing support to any individuals who may have been hurt. In addition, the elders remain alert regarding the alleged abuser to protect the congregation from potential danger.—Acts 20:28.

¹⁷ *What is the role of the judicial committee?* The term “judicial” does not mean that the elders judge, or rule on, whether the abuser should be punished by the authorities for breaking the law. The elders do not interfere with law enforcement; they leave criminal matters to the secular authorities. (Rom. 13:2-4; Titus 3:1) Instead, the elders judge, or determine, whether an individual can remain in the congregation.

* A child is never required to confront an alleged abuser. A parent or another trusted confidant may advise the elders of the allegation without exposing the child to further emotional harm.

17-18. Explain the role of the judicial committee.

18 When elders serve on a judicial committee, their role is spiritual, or religious. Guided by the Scriptures, they judge whether the abuser is repentant or not. If he is unrepentant, he is expelled, and an announcement is made to the congregation. (1 Cor. 5: 11-13) If he is repentant, he may remain in the congregation. However, the elders will inform him that he may never qualify to receive any congregation privileges or to serve in any position of responsibility in the congregation. Out of concern for the welfare of children, the elders may privately warn the parents of minors in the congregation of the need to monitor their children's interactions with the individual. When taking such measures, the elders are careful to maintain the privacy of those hurt by the sin.

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN

19 Who have the responsibility to protect children from harm? Parents do.* Your children are a sacred trust, “an inheritance from Jehovah.” (Ps. 127:3) It is your responsibility to safeguard that trust. What can you do to protect your children from abuse?

* What is said about parents also applies to legal guardians or others who have parental responsibility for a minor.

19-22. What can parents do to protect their children? (See cover picture.)

Educate Yourself and Your Children

For Parents to Use With Their Children

- ▶ “Your Child Is in Danger!,” “How Can We Protect Our Children?,” and “Prevention in the Home” *Awake!* October 8, 1993
- ▶ “A Danger That Concerns Every Parent,” “How to Protect Your Children,” and “Make Your Family a Safe Haven” *Awake!* October 2007
- ▶ “How to Be a Good Father” *The Watchtower*, October 1, 2008
- ▶ “Talk to Your Children About Sex” *The Watchtower*, November 1, 2010
- ▶ *We Protect Our Children*, video available on JW Broadcasting®
- ▶ “Jehovah’s Witnesses Educate Parents and Children to Protect Against Sexual Predators,” available on jw.org® (Look under ABOUT US > ACTIVITIES.)
- ▶ “How Can Parents Teach Their Children About Sex?” available on jw.org (Look under BIBLE TEACHINGS > BIBLE QUESTIONS ANSWERED.)
- ▶ *Learn From the Great Teacher*, chapters 10 and 32
- ▶ *Become Jehovah’s Friend—Protect Your Children*, video available on jw.org (Look under BIBLE TEACHINGS > CHILDREN.)

²⁰ First, *educate yourself about abuse*. Learn about the kind of individuals who abuse children and the tactics they use to deceive them. Be alert to potential dangers. (Prov. 22:3; 24:3) Remember that in most cases, the abuser is someone the child already knows and trusts.

For Teenagers

- ▶ *What Your Peers Say—Sexual Harassment*, video available on jw.org (Look under BIBLE TEACHINGS > TEENAGERS.)
- ▶ “How Can I Protect Myself From Sexual Predators?” *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*, Volume 1, chapter 32
- ▶ “Young People Ask—What Should I Know About Sexual Assault?—Part 1: Precautions,” available on jw.org (Look under BIBLE TEACHINGS > TEENAGERS.)
- ▶ “What Should I Know About Sexual Assault?” *Answers to 10 Questions Young People Ask*, Question 8

Comfort for Victims

- ▶ “Help for the Victims of Incest” *The Watchtower*, October 1, 1983
- ▶ “The Innocent Victims of Child Abuse” and “The Secret Wounds of Child Abuse” *Awake!* October 8, 1991
- ▶ “Young People Ask—What Should I Know About Sexual Assault?—Part 2: Recovery,” available on jw.org (Look under BIBLE TEACHINGS > TEENAGERS.)
- ▶ “Providing Comfort for Victims of Abuse” *The Watchtower*, May 2019, Study Article 20

²¹ Second, *maintain good communication with your children.* (Deut. 6:6, 7) That includes being a good listener. (Jas. 1:19) Remember that children are often reluctant to report abuse. They may fear that they will not be believed, or they may have been threatened by the abuser to keep the abuse secret. If you sense that

something is wrong, kindly draw them out with questions and then patiently listen to their answers.

²² Third, *educate your children*. Share with them age-appropriate information about sex. Teach them what to say and do if someone tries to touch them in an inappropriate way. Use the information that God’s organization has provided on how to protect your children.—See the box “Educate Yourself and Your Children.”

²³ As Jehovah’s Witnesses, we view child sexual abuse as a gross sin and a wicked deed. Governed by the law of the Christ, our congregations do not shield perpetrators of abuse from the consequences of their sins. Meanwhile, what can we do to help those who have suffered abuse? The next article will answer that question.

23. How do we view child sexual abuse, and what question will the next article answer?

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- Why is child abuse a grave sin?
- When they handle instances of serious wrongdoing, what concerns do elders have?
- How can parents protect their children from abuse?

PART 4 OF 4

Providing Comfort for Victims of Abuse

“The God of all comfort . . . comforts us in all our trials.”

—2 COR. 1:3, 4.

SONG 134

Children Are a Trust From God

PREVIEW

Those who have endured sexual abuse in childhood may face challenges even years later. This article will help us to understand why. We will also consider who may be able to comfort such ones. Finally, we will discuss some effective ways in which we can provide comfort.

HUMANS have a natural need for comfort and a remarkable ability to provide it. For instance, when a little child falls and skins his knee while playing, he may run to Mommy or Daddy, crying. The parents cannot heal the wound, but they can comfort the child. They may ask what happened, wipe away his tears, offer soothing words and affection, and perhaps apply some medicine or a bandage. Before long, the child stops crying and may even resume playing. In time, the wound will heal.

² Sometimes, though, children are hurt in far worse ways. Some are sexually abused. The abuse can be inflicted on a single occasion, or it may go on for years. In either case, the abuse can leave deep emotional scars. In some cases, the offender is caught and punished. In others, the abuser may seem to escape justice. But even if justice is swift, the harmful effects of the abuse may last well into adulthood.

³ If a Christian who was abused as a child still struggles with emotional pain as an adult, what help is available? (Read **2 Corinthians 1:3, 4.**) Clearly, it is Jehovah's will that his sheep receive the love and com-

1-2. (a) What example shows that humans have a natural need for comfort and an ability to provide it? (b) How are some children hurt?

3. As mentioned at 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4, what is Jehovah's will, and what questions will we address?

fort they need. So let us address three questions: (1) Why may those who have endured child abuse need comfort? (2) Who can provide the comfort needed? (3) How can we offer comfort effectively?

WHY IS COMFORT NEEDED?

⁴ For some adults who suffered childhood abuse, comfort may still be needed even though many years have passed. Why? In order to understand, we must first realize that children are very different from adults. A child is often affected in ways that are quite different from the ways that an adult might be affected by mistreatment. Consider some examples.

⁵ *Children need to form close, trusting bonds with those who raise them and care for them.* Such bonds make children feel secure and teach them to trust others who love them. (Ps. 22:9) Sadly, abuse most often occurs in the home, and close family members and family friends are common perpetrators. Breaking a child's trust in this way can make it hard for that child to trust others, even years later.

⁶ *Children are vulnerable, and sexual abuse is cruel and harmful.* Subjecting children to sexual acts many years before they are physically, emotionally, or

4-5. (a) Why is it important to realize that children differ from adults? (b) How may abuse affect a child's ability to trust others?
6. Why is sexual abuse cruel and harmful?

mentally ready for sex within marriage can do great harm. Abuse can badly distort their view of sex, of themselves, or of anyone who seeks to be close to them.

⁷ Children are not fully developed in their ability to think, to reason, or to recognize and avoid danger. (1 Cor. 13:11) So it is all too easy for devious abusers to deceive children. Abusers teach children dangerous lies, such as the idea that the child is to blame, that the abuse must be kept secret, that no one will listen or care if the child reports the abuse, or that sexual acts between an adult and a child are actually normal expressions of sincere love. Such lies can distort a child's thinking ability and perception of truth for many years. Such a child may grow up thinking of herself or himself as damaged, defiled, and unworthy of love or comfort.

⁸ It is not surprising, then, that sexual abuse can cause lasting harm. How evil this crime is! Such widespread abuse is clear evidence that we are living in the last days, a time when many have “no natural affection” and when “wicked men and impostors will ad-

7. (a) Why may a devious abuser find it easy to fool a child, and how might the abuser do so? (b) What may be the results of such lies?

8. Why can we be sure that Jehovah can provide comfort to those who have been hurt?

vance from bad to worse.” (2 Tim. 3:1-5, 13) Satan’s designs are truly evil, and it is sad when humans act in a way that pleases the Devil. However, Jehovah is far stronger than Satan or his servants. He is never blind to Satan’s tactics. We can be sure that Jehovah is fully aware of the pain we experience, and he can provide the comfort we need. We are blessed to serve “the God of all comfort, who comforts us in *all* our trials so that we may be able to comfort others in *any* sort of trial with the comfort that we receive from God.” (2 Cor. 1: 3, 4) Whom, though, does Jehovah use to offer comfort?

WHO CAN PROVIDE COMFORT?

⁹ Those who have been abandoned by parents or victimized by people close to them may especially need comfort. The psalmist David knew that Jehovah is the most reliable provider of comfort. (Read Psalm 27: 10.) David had faith that Jehovah takes in those who have been rejected by their loved ones. How does Jehovah do so? He uses his faithful human servants. Our fellow worshippers of Jehovah are our spiritual family. For instance, Jesus spoke of those who joined him in worshipping Jehovah as his brothers, sisters, and mother.—Matt. 12:48-50.

9. According to King David’s words found at Psalm 27:10, what will Jehovah do for those who are abandoned by their own family?

¹⁰ Consider an example of such familylike relationships in the Christian congregation. The apostle Paul was a hardworking, faithful elder. He set a fine example, and he was even inspired to tell others to imitate him as he imitated Christ. (1 Cor. 11:1) Note how Paul once described his work as an elder: “We became gentle in your midst, as when a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.” (1 Thess. 2:7) Loyal elders today can likewise use tender, gentle words as they offer Scriptural comfort to those in need.

¹¹ Are elders the only ones who can give comfort to victims of abuse? No. All of us have a responsibility to

10. How did the apostle Paul describe his work as an elder?

11. What shows that elders are not the only ones who can give comfort?



Mature Christian sisters are often very effective at giving comfort

(See paragraph 11)

“keep comforting one another.” (1 Thess. 4:18) Mature Christian sisters can be especially encouraging to sisters in need of comfort. Fittingly, Jehovah God likened himself to a mother who comforts her son. (Isa. 66:13) The Bible includes examples of women who provided comfort to those in distress. (Job 42:11) How delighted Jehovah is to see Christian women today offering comfort to fellow sisters who struggle with emotional pain! In some cases, an elder or two may discreetly ask a mature sister if she is in a position to help a suffering sister in that way.*

HOW CAN WE OFFER COMFORT?

¹² Of course, we are careful not to pry into matters that a fellow Christian prefers to keep private. (1 Thess. 4:11) What, though, can we do for those who need and want help and comfort? Let us consider five Scriptural ways in which we may offer comfort.

¹³ *Offer practical help.* When the prophet Elijah was on the run for his life, he was so discouraged that he wished for death. Jehovah sent a mighty angel to visit that discouraged man. The angel provided

* Whether an individual who has suffered abuse should seek qualified professional help is a personal decision.

12. What are we careful not to do?

13. As related at 1 Kings 19:5-8, what did Jehovah’s angel do for Elijah, and how might we imitate the angel?

very practical help. He gave Elijah a hot meal and encouraged him to eat. (Read 1 Kings 19:5-8.) That account illustrates a useful truth: Sometimes a simple act of practical kindness can do a great deal of good. Perhaps a meal, a modest gift, or a thoughtful card would assure a downhearted brother or sister of our love and concern. If we feel uncomfortable discussing very personal or painful subjects, perhaps we can still give such practical help.

¹⁴ *Make distressed ones feel safe and comfortable.* We may learn another lesson from the account about Elijah. Jehovah miraculously gave the prophet the help he needed to go all the way to Mount Horeb. Perhaps at that remote spot, where Jehovah had made his covenant with his people centuries earlier, Elijah felt safe. He may have felt that he was, at last, far out of the reach of those who sought to do him harm. What lesson may we draw? If we want to offer comfort to victims of abuse, we may need first to help them feel safe. For instance, elders should keep in mind that a distressed sister may feel safer and more comfortable having a cup of tea in a relaxed setting at home than she would in a Kingdom Hall conference room. Another might feel the opposite.

¹⁵ *Be a good listener.* The Bible offers this clear

14. What lesson can we learn from the account about Elijah?

15-16. What is involved in being a good listener?

advice: “Everyone must be quick to listen, slow to speak.” (Jas. 1:19) Are we good listeners? We might tend to think of listening as a passive act—as if it means nothing more than staying still, looking at the person, and saying nothing. But good listening involves more than that. For example, Elijah finally poured out his anguished feelings to Jehovah, and Jehovah truly listened. Jehovah perceived that Elijah was scared, felt alone, and thought that all his work had been for nothing. Jehovah lovingly addressed each concern. He showed that he had truly listened to Elijah.—1 Ki. 19:9-11, 15-18.

¹⁶ How can we show sympathy and tender compassion—which are expressions of love—while listening? At times, a few tactful, warm words may show how we feel. You might say: “I am so sorry that happened to you! No child should be treated that way!” Perhaps you could ask a question or two to make sure you understand what the anguished friend is saying. You might ask, “Can you please help me understand what you mean?” or “When you said that, I concluded . . . Did I get it right?” Such loving expressions may assure the person that you are truly listening, trying to make sure that you understand.—1 Cor. 13:4, 7.

¹⁷ Be careful, though, to remain “slow to speak.” Do not interrupt to give advice or to correct the person’s

17. Why should we be patient and “slow to speak”?



We can provide healing by listening patiently, praying earnestly, and choosing comforting words
(See paragraphs 15-20)

thinking. And be patient! When Elijah finally poured out his heart to Jehovah, he spoke in strong terms, expressing anguish. Later, after Jehovah strengthened Elijah's faith, the man poured out his feelings again, using the very same words. (1 Ki. 19:9, 10, 13, 14) The lesson? Sometimes distressed ones need to pour out their heart more than once. Like Jehovah, we want to listen patiently. Rather than trying to provide solutions, we offer sympathy and tender compassion. —1 Pet. 3:8.

¹⁸ *Pray earnestly with the one in pain.* Those who are

18. How can our prayers prove to be comforting to those who are in pain?

very low in spirits may feel unable to pray. A person may feel unworthy to approach Jehovah. If we want to comfort such a person, we may offer a prayer with that one, using his or her name. We may express to Jehovah how dear the downhearted one is to us and to the congregation. We may ask Jehovah to soothe and comfort that precious sheep of his. Prayers of that kind can be profoundly comforting.—Jas. 5:16.

19 *Choose words that heal and console.* Think before you speak. Thoughtless words can hurt. Kind words can heal. (Prov. 12:18) So pray to Jehovah for help to find kind, comforting, soothing words. Keep in mind that no words are more powerful than Jehovah’s own expressions contained in the Bible.—Heb. 4:12.

20 Past abuse may have convinced some that they are dirty, worthless, or unloved—even unlovable. What a terrible lie! So use the Scriptures to remind them of their true value in Jehovah’s eyes. (See the box “Comfort From the Scriptures.”) Remember how an angel kindly strengthened the prophet Daniel when he was feeling weak and low. Jehovah wanted that dear man to know that he was precious. (Dan. 10:2, 11, 19) Likewise, our anguished brothers and sisters are precious to Jehovah!

19. What might help us to prepare to comfort someone?

20. Of what may bad experiences have convinced some, and of what do we want to remind them?

Comfort From the Scriptures



What scriptures have been especially comforting to survivors of sexual abuse? A great many could be listed, but these are just a few that offer comfort. Below each Scripture citation is either a comment or a quotation showing how the verses may be applied in a helpful way.

JOB 34:22-28 In some cases, abusers may seem to get away with their wicked deeds. But they cannot hide from Jehovah, who hears the cries of their victims. Trusting in Jehovah’s justice can help us find peace.

PSALM 62:8 “As that verse encourages, I poured out my heart before Jehovah, and I begged him for comfort and for a sound heart and mind. Through constant prayer to Jehovah, I gradually found real comfort and peace of mind.”—An elder who was sexually abused when he was about nine.—See also Psalm 56:8-13.

ISAIAH 41:10, 13 These verses paint a comforting picture of Jehovah as a loving, protective Father who helps his servants during hard times. God’s people around the world have experienced the truthfulness of those words, including in the wake of abuse.

ISAIAH 32:1, 2 “I turned to the elders for help. They sat down with me on several occasions and took their time talking to me. They showed personal interest and listened carefully. They prayed with me and for me.”—A Christian sister who was molested at about age six.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4, 7 Keep those verses in mind when listening to someone disclose past abuse. Avoid expressions of disbelief or skepticism. Many abusers tell children that if they report the abuse, no one will believe them. Some children grow up thinking that. So focus instead on the very real pain of your fellow Christian, and offer what comfort you can.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:4, 5 Sexual abuse can teach young ones to believe lies, but God’s inspired Word can overturn even the most entrenched of satanic lies.

1 JOHN 3:19, 20 When our heart condemns us unfairly, we must remember that Jehovah “is greater than our hearts and knows all things.” His Word can reassure us of this truth: We are precious in God’s eyes.

See chapter 24 of the book *Draw Close to Jehovah*.

²¹ When we comfort others, we remind them of Jehovah’s love. And we must never forget that Jehovah is also a God of justice. No wicked act of abuse is really hidden. Jehovah sees all, and he will not let unrepentant wrongdoers go unpunished. (Num. 14:18) Meanwhile, let us do all we can to show love to those who have experienced abuse. Moreover, how comforting it is to know that Jehovah will permanently heal all those who have been abused by Satan and his world! Soon, these painful things will never again come up into the mind or heart.—Isa. 65:17.

21. What future awaits all unrepentant wrongdoers, but what should we all be resolved to do in the meanwhile?

PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS Page 32: A mature sister comforts a sister who is in emotional pain. Page 36: Two elders visit the sister who is in distress. She has invited the mature sister to be present.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- Why may those who endured child abuse need comfort even years later?
- Who may provide comfort to those in need?
- What are effective ways to offer comfort?

Do Not Be Fooled by “the Wisdom of This World”

*“The wisdom of this world
is foolishness with God.”*—1 COR. 3:19.

SONG 98

The Scriptures —Inspired of God

PREVIEW

This article will help us strengthen our conviction that Jehovah is the only reliable Source of guidance. Also, it will show that following the world’s wisdom has tragic consequences, whereas applying the wisdom of God’s Word is beneficial.

WE CAN face any challenge—all because Jehovah is our Grand Instructor. (Isa. 30:20, 21) His Word gives us everything we need to be “fully competent” and “completely equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:17) When we live by Bible teachings, we become wiser than those who promote “the wisdom of this world.”—1 Cor. 3:19; Ps. 119:97-100.

² As we will see, the wisdom of the world often appeals to our fleshly desires. So we might find it difficult to resist thinking and acting like those who are part of the world. For good reason, the Bible says: “Look out that no one takes you captive by means of the philosophy and empty deception according to human tradition.” (Col. 2:8) In this article, we will examine the history of how two empty deceptions, or lies, became popular. In each case, we will see why the wisdom of the world is foolishness and how the wisdom of God’s Word is far superior to anything the world offers.

CHANGES IN VIEWPOINT TOWARD MORALITY

³ In the United States, the early part of the 20th century saw a big change in people’s viewpoints about morality. Previously, many believed that sex was reserved

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1. What does God’s Word give us?
 2. What will we examine in this article?
 - 3-4. What changes in viewpoint toward morality took place in the United States in the early part of the 20th century?

only for those who are married and was not a topic to be discussed in public. But those standards crumbled, and permissive views spread.

⁴ The third decade of the 20th century became known as the Roaring Twenties, and it was characterized by far-reaching social changes. “Motion pictures, plays, songs, novels, and advertising all reflected the market for sexually-themed entertainment,” says one researcher. During that decade, dancing styles became more sexually suggestive and clothing styles became less modest. As the Bible foretold about the last days, people would to a remarkable degree become “lovers of pleasures.”—2 Tim. 3:4.

⁵ In the 1960’s, issues such as living together without being married, homosexual conduct, and easy divorce became prominent. Many forms of entertainment featured increasingly explicit depictions of sex. In recent decades, the bad effects of loose moral standards have been felt in many ways. One author wrote that the cause of broken families, single-parent families, emotional wounds, pornography addiction, and similar woes is related to “the deregulation of sexual norms now shaping society.” The prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases, such as AIDS, is just one indication that the wisdom of the world is foolishness.—2 Pet. 2:19.

5. What has happened to the world’s viewpoint of moral standards since the 1960’s?



Jehovah's people
are not swayed by
the world's loose
moral standards
(See paragraph 5)

6 The world's view of sex serves Satan's purpose. No doubt, he delights to see people abuse God's gift of sex and degrade God's gift of marriage. (Eph. 2:2) Not only does sexual immorality tarnish Jehovah's beautiful gift of procreation but it can prevent those who engage in it from inheriting everlasting life.—1 Cor. 6:9, 10.

THE BIBLE'S VIEW OF SEXUAL MORALITY

7 People who adopt the wisdom of this world ridicule the Bible's moral standards, claiming that they are unrealistic. Such people might ask, 'Why would God create us with sexual desires and then tell us not to act on them?' That question is founded on the flawed belief that humans must act on every urge they feel. But

6. How does the world's view of sex serve Satan's purpose?

7-8. What dignified and healthy view of sexuality is presented in the Bible?

the Bible states otherwise. It dignifies us by teaching that we can choose to control improper impulses. (Col. 3:5) In addition, Jehovah has provided the gift of marriage, an arrangement in which proper sexual desires can be honorably satisfied. (1 Cor. 7:8, 9) Within that arrangement, a husband and wife can enjoy sex without the regrets and insecurities that so often result from immorality.

⁸ In contrast with the wisdom of this world, the Bible promotes a healthy view of sexuality. It acknowledges that sex can be a source of pleasure. (Prov. 5:18, 19) However, the Bible says: “Each one of you should know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not with greedy, uncontrolled sexual passion like the nations have that do not know God.”—1 Thess. 4:4, 5.

⁹ During the early 20th century, Jehovah’s people were not swayed by the empty deception of those who had “gone past all moral sense.” (Eph. 4:19) They tried to stick closely to Jehovah’s standards. The May 15, 1926, *Watch Tower* stated that “a man or a woman should be chaste and pure in thought and in act, particularly with reference to the opposite sex.” Regardless of what was happening in the world around

9. (a) How were Jehovah’s people in the early 20th century encouraged to follow the superior wisdom of God’s Word? (b) What wise counsel is found at 1 John 2:15, 16? (c) As listed at Romans 1:24-27, what immoral practices should we resist adopting?

them, Jehovah’s people followed the superior wisdom of God’s Word. (Read 1 John 2:15, 16.) How grateful we are for God’s Word! We are also thankful that Jehovah provides timely spiritual food to help us resist adopting the wisdom of this world regarding morality.*
—Read Romans 1:24-27.

CHANGES IN VIEWPOINT TOWARD LOVE OF SELF

¹⁰ The Bible warned that during the last days, people would become “lovers of themselves.” (2 Tim. 3:1, 2) Not surprisingly, the world has encouraged an inflated view of self. One reference work says that during the 1970’s “self-help books proliferated.” Some books “urged readers to know and accept themselves and to celebrate who they were.” Consider, for example, the statement made in one such book: “Be in love with the most beautiful, exciting, worthy person ever—you.” The book advocates a “religion of the self in which an individual determines his own behavior based upon his own conscience and the laws of his culture that work for him.”

¹¹ Does that idea sound familiar to you? Satan encouraged Eve to do something similar. He said that she

* For example, see *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*, Volume 1, chaps. 24-26, and Volume 2, chaps. 4-5.

10-11. What did the Bible warn would happen during the last days?

could “be like God, knowing good and bad.” (Gen. 3:5) Today, many think so highly of themselves that in their opinion no one—not even God—can tell them what is right and what is wrong. For example, that attitude has become especially evident in the way people view marriage.

¹² The Bible instructs the husband and wife to honor each other and their marriage vows. It encourages marriage mates to have a deep sense of commitment to each other, stating: “A man will leave his father and his mother and he will stick to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” (Gen. 2:24) In contrast, those influenced by the wisdom of the world promote a different view, saying that each spouse should focus on his or her own needs. “In some ceremonies,” notes one book about divorce, “the traditional pledge to marry for ‘as long as we both shall live’ was replaced with the more limited promise to marry for ‘as long as we both shall love.’” Such a casual view of marriage has led to countless broken families and has caused immeasurable emotional harm. Without a doubt, the world’s disrespectful view of marriage is a foolish teaching.

¹³ The Bible says: “Everyone proud in heart is detestable to Jehovah.” (Prov. 16:5) Why does Jehovah detest proud people? One reason is that those who

12. What view of marriage does the world promote?

13. What is one reason why Jehovah detests proud people?



God's servants look back with satisfaction on a life spent in Jehovah's service (See paragraph 17)

A Christian puts the needs of others first —especially those of his marriage mate (See paragraph 12)



develop and promote an inflated love of self reflect Satan's own arrogance. Imagine, Satan believed that Jesus—the one whom God used to create all things—should bow down and worship him! (Matt. 4:8, 9; Col. 1:15, 16) Those with such an inflated view of their own importance confirm that the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God.

THE BIBLE'S VIEW OF SELF-IMPORTANCE

¹⁴ The Bible helps us to have a balanced view of ourselves. It acknowledges that a degree of self-love

14. How does Romans 12:3 help us to have a balanced view of ourselves?

is proper. Jesus said: “Love your neighbor as yourself,” which indicates that we should give a reasonable amount of attention to our needs. (Matt. 19:19) However, the Bible does not teach that we should elevate ourselves above others. Rather, it states: “Do nothing out of contentiousness or out of egotism, but with humility consider others superior to you.”—Phil. 2:3; read Romans 12:3.

¹⁵ Today, many people who are considered wise would ridicule the Bible’s counsel about self-importance. They would say that considering others superior to you would make you vulnerable and that others would take advantage of you. Really, though, what fruitage has the self-centered attitude promoted by Satan’s world produced? What have you observed? Are selfish people happy? Do they have happy families? Do they have genuine friends? Do they have a close friendship with God? From what you have seen, which produces the best results—following the wisdom of this world or the wisdom found in God’s Word?

¹⁶ People who follow the advice of those whom the world views as wise are like a tourist who asks a fellow tourist for directions when both of them are lost. Jesus said regarding the “wise” men of his day: “Blind

15. Why do you feel that the Bible’s counsel about self-importance is practical?

16-17. For what can we be thankful, and why?

guides is what they are. If, then, a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.” (Matt. 15:14) Truly, the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.

¹⁷ The Bible’s wise counsel has always proved to be “beneficial for teaching, for reproof, for correcting, for disciplining in righteousness.” (2 Tim. 3:16, ftn.) How thankful we can be that Jehovah, through his organization, has protected us from the wisdom of this world! (Eph. 4:14) The spiritual food he has provided gives us the strength we need to cling to the standards of his Word. What a privilege it is to be guided by the infallible wisdom found in the Bible!

PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS Page 44: We see some moments in the life of a married Witness couple through time. The brother and sister share in the preaching work during the late 1960’s. **Page 48:** In the 1980’s, the husband cares for his wife during her time of illness while the couple’s young daughter looks on. Today, the couple relive happy memories of their life spent in Jehovah’s service. Their grown daughter and her family share in the couple’s joy.

CAN YOU RECALL?

- Why is the world’s view of morality foolishness with God?
- How does the Bible’s view of sexual morality dignify humans?
- How does the Bible help us to have a balanced view of ourselves?

SONG 54
“This Is the Way”

Improve Your Study Habits!

“Make sure of the more important things.”—PHIL. 1:10.

SONG 35

“Make Sure of the More Important Things”

PREVIEW

Jehovah generously gives us an abundance of material to watch, to read, and to study. This article will help you decide what to study, and it offers practical suggestions on how to get the most out of your study sessions.

IT TAKES a great deal of effort to earn a living these days. Many of our brothers work long hours just to provide the necessities of life for their families. Countless others spend several hours each workday traveling to and from their place of employment. Many support themselves by doing hard physical labor. By the end of the day, these hardworking brothers and sisters are exhausted! The last thing many are inclined to do is study.

² The fact is, though, that we *must* find time to study—really study—God’s Word and our Christian publications. Our relationship with Jehovah and our everlasting life depend on it! (1 Tim. 4:15) Some rise early every day and study when their home is quiet and their mind is fresh after a night’s rest. Others set aside a few tranquil minutes at the end of the day to take in spiritual food and meditate on it.

³ No doubt you agree that it is important to find time to study. But *what* should we study? ‘There is so much to read,’ you may say. ‘I find it hard to keep up.’ Some manage to take full advantage of every spiritual provision, but many of our brothers struggle to find the time to do so. The Governing Body is aware of

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1. Why might some not be inclined to study?
 2. When do you find time to study?
 - 3-4. What adjustments have been made to the amount of material that is provided, and why?

this. For that reason, direction was recently given to reduce the amount of material provided both in print and in digital form.

⁴ For example, we no longer publish the *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses*, since many encouraging experiences are available on jw.org[®] as well as on the monthly programs of JW Broadcasting[®]. The public edition of the *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines are now published just three times a year. These adjustments have not been made so that we will have more time to pursue other activities. They have been put in place to enable us to give careful attention to “the more important things.” (Phil. 1:10) Let us discuss how you can set priorities and how you can benefit fully from personal Bible study.

SET YOUR PRIORITIES

⁵ What should our priorities include? We should certainly spend time each day studying God's Word. The amount of material now scheduled for the congregation's weekly Bible reading has been reduced in order to give us more time to meditate on what we read and to do extra research. Our goal should be, not merely to cover the assigned material, but to allow the Bible's message to touch our hearts and to draw us closer to Jehovah.—Ps. 19:14.

5-6. What publications should we be sure to study carefully?

⁶ What else should we study carefully? Of course, we want to prepare the material for the *Watchtower* Study and the Congregation Bible Study as well as other material for the midweek meeting. We should also keep up with each issue of *The Watchtower* and *Awake!*

⁷ ‘Fine,’ you may say, ‘but what about all the features that appear on our website, jw.org, as well as the material that is presented on JW Broadcasting? There is so much!’ Consider an illustration: A great variety of delicious food is available on a buffet at a restaurant. The patrons of the restaurant could never sample everything that is offered. So they choose just a few dishes. Similarly, if you are unable to keep up with everything that is supplied electronically, do not be discouraged. Read or watch what you can. Let us now discuss what is involved in study and how to derive the most benefit from our study.

STUDY IS WORK!

⁸ To study is to read with sustained, purposeful concentration. It is not just a matter of skimming the

7. Should we be discouraged if we cannot keep up with the abundance of features published on our website and on JW Broadcasting?

8. What steps might we take when studying *The Watchtower*, and how will doing so benefit you?

assigned material and underlining the answers. When preparing for the *Watchtower* Study, for example, first take note of the preview at the beginning of the article. Next, consider the title of the article, as well as the subheadings and the review questions. Then, read the article slowly and carefully. Take note of the topic sentence, which is usually the first sentence of every paragraph. The topic sentence will often alert you to the direction in which the paragraph will be taking you. As you read through the article, think about the way each paragraph supports the subheading and ties in with the general theme of the article. Make a note of any unfamiliar words and of points that you would like to clarify through further research.

⁹ The *Watchtower* Study is a study of the Bible. Therefore, pay particular attention to the scriptures, especially those that will be read when the congregation considers the material. Take special note of how the key words or phrases in the scriptures support the point being made in the paragraph. Moreover, take time to meditate on the scriptures that you read, and reflect on how you can personally apply them in your life.—Read Joshua 1:8.

9. (a) Why and how should we pay particular attention to the scriptures when we study *The Watchtower*? (b) As noted at Joshua 1:8, what should we do in addition to reading scriptures?



Parents, teach your children how to study
(See paragraph 10)

¹⁰ Understandably, parents want the weekly Family Worship period to be a pleasant experience for their children. However, although parents should always have something definite in mind for family worship, there is no need for them to feel that they must organize special activities or exciting projects each week. While the Family Worship period may be spent watching a monthly program on JW Broadcasting or occasionally working on a special project, such as assembling a model of Noah's ark, it is also important for

10. In line with Hebrews 5:14, why should parents spend time during family worship to teach their children how to study and do research?

children to be taught how to study. They need to learn how to prepare for congregation meetings, for example, or how to do research on an issue that has arisen at school. (Read Hebrews 5:14.) If they spend some time on study projects at home, they will be better equipped to focus on the material presented at congregation meetings, assemblies, and conventions, which may not always feature a video. Of course, the length of each study period will depend on the age and temperament of the children.

¹¹ Our Bible students also need to learn how to study. When they are new, we are happy to see them simply underline the answers in preparation for their Bible study or for congregation meetings. But we do need to teach our Bible students how to do research and how to do meaningful study on their own. In that way, when problems arise, instead of immediately turning to others in the congregation for help, they will know how to get practical advice for themselves by doing research in our publications.

STUDY WITH A PURPOSE

¹² If you are not a studious person, you may not think it possible to learn to enjoy studying. But

11. Why is it important that we teach our Bible students how to do meaningful study on their own?

12. What goals might we have when we study?

you can. Start out with shorter periods, and then gradually increase the time you spend. Have a goal in mind. Of course, our ultimate goal should be to draw ever closer to Jehovah. A more immediate goal may be to answer a question that someone has asked or to do research on a problem that we are facing.

¹³ As an example, are you a young person in school? Your classmates may all believe in the theory of evolution. You would like to defend the Bible's teaching, but perhaps you do not feel qualified to do so. That calls for a study project! Your aim could be twofold: (1) to strengthen your own conviction that God created all things and (2) to improve in your ability to defend the truth. (Rom. 1:20; 1 Pet. 3:15) You might first ask yourself, 'What arguments have my classmates used in support of evolution?' Then using our publications, do careful research. Defending your beliefs may not be as hard as you think. Most people believe in evolution simply because someone they respect told them that it is true. If you find just a point or two that you can share, you may provide a satisfactory answer to a sincere inquirer.—**Read Colossians 4:6.**

13. (a) Explain the steps a young person could take to defend his beliefs in school. (b) How can you apply the counsel found at Colossians 4:6?

DEVELOP YOUR INTEREST

¹⁴ Suppose that at an upcoming congregation meeting we are scheduled to explore the writings of one of the so-called minor prophets, perhaps one with whom you are not very familiar. The first step might be to develop an interest in what that prophet wrote. How might you accomplish that?

¹⁵ First, ask yourself: ‘What do I know about the writer of the book? Who was he, where did he live, what was his occupation?’ The background of the writer may also explain his choice of words or the type of illustrations he used. As you read the Bible, look for phrases that reflect the personality of the writer.

¹⁶ Next, you will find it helpful to place the writing of the book in the stream of time. You can easily do that by checking the “Table of the Books of the Bible” in the back of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. In addition, you could review the chart of prophets and kings in Appendix A6. If the Bible book you are studying is prophetic, you would do well to find out about conditions that existed at the time of writing. What bad attitudes or practices did the prophet hope to correct? Who were his

14-16. (a) How might you get better acquainted with a Bible book with which you are not very familiar? (b) Using the cited scriptures, explain how you could obtain a more rounded-out picture of the book of Amos. (See also the box “Bring the Bible to Life!”)



Bring the Bible to Life!

By careful study of the Scriptures, we come to see Bible characters as real people who had thoughts and feelings just like ours. Consider some details about Amos.

- ▶ He “took care of sycamore fig trees” and was a sheep raiser who came from a humble background.—Amos 1:1; 7:14.
- ▶ He willingly left his home in Judah to carry out his assignment as a prophet in Israel.—Amos 7:15.
- ▶ He was ordered to stop his preaching work.—Amos 7:10-13.

Can you relate to Amos? You may have much in common with other Bible characters too. Bring them all to life through diligent study!

contemporaries? To get a complete overview, you may need to consult more than one source. For example, to understand more fully what was taking place when the prophet Amos lived, you will benefit by consulting passages in the books of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, which are listed in the marginal references to Amos 1:1. In addition, you might review the writings of Hosea, who may have been a contemporary of Amos. All these sources would help shed light on the period in which Amos lived.—2 Ki. 14:25-28; 2 Chron. 26:1-15; Hos. 1:1-11; Amos 1:1.

PAY ATTENTION TO DETAIL

¹⁷ It is good to read the Bible with a healthy dose of curiosity. Suppose, for example, that you are reading the 12th chapter of Zechariah's prophecy, which foretells the death of the Messiah. (Zech. 12:10) When you come to verse 12, you read that "the family of Nathan's house" would grieve bitterly at the Messiah's death. Instead of quickly passing over that detail, you pause and ask yourself: "What is the connection between the house of Nathan and the Messiah? Is there any way to get more information?" You do a little "detective" work. A marginal reference leads you to 2 Samuel 5:13, 14, where you learn that Nathan was one of King David's sons. A second marginal reference, Luke 3:23, 31, reveals that Jesus was a direct descendant of Nathan through Mary. (See "Joseph, son of Heli," study note on Luke 3:23.) Suddenly, you are intrigued! You knew that Jesus was foretold to be a descendant of David. (Matt. 22:42) But David had more than 20 sons. Is it not amazing that Zechariah pinpoints the household of Nathan in particular as having a reason to mourn the death of Jesus?

¹⁸ Consider another example. In the first chapter of Luke, we read that the angel Gabriel visited Mary and

17-18. Using the examples in the paragraphs or an example of your own, illustrate how paying attention to seemingly small details can make personal Bible study enjoyable.

announced regarding the son she was to bear: “This one will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and Jehovah God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will *rule as King* over the house of Jacob forever.” (Luke 1:32, 33) We might be inclined to focus on the first part of Gabriel’s message, namely, that Jesus would be called “Son of the Most High.” But Gabriel also prophesied that Jesus would “rule as King.” So we ask ourselves what those words of Gabriel might have meant to Mary. Did she take Gabriel’s words to mean that Jesus would replace King Herod—or one of his successors as the ruler in Israel? If Jesus did become king, Mary would be the queen mother, and her family would live in the royal palace. Yet, there is no record that Mary even raised such a possibility with Gabriel; nor do we ever read that Mary asked for a position of favor in the Kingdom, as two of Jesus’ disciples did. (Matt. 20:20-23) This detail reinforces our picture of Mary as an extremely humble woman!

¹⁹ Let us remember that our ultimate goal in studying God’s Word and our Christian publications is to draw closer to Jehovah. We also want to see more clearly “what sort of person” we are and what changes we need to make in order to please God. (Read

19-20. As described at James 1:22-25 and 4:8, what are our goals when we study?

James 1:22-25; 4:8.) At the beginning of each study period, then, we should ask Jehovah for his spirit. We should beg him to help us to benefit fully from the material and to see ourselves as he sees us.

²⁰ May all of us be like the man of God described by the psalmist: “His *delight* is in the law of Jehovah, and he reads His law in an undertone day and night. . . . Everything he does will succeed.”—Ps. 1:2, 3.

PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS Page 56: Parents show their children how to prepare for the weekly *Watchtower* Study. **Page 60:** A brother does research on the Bible writer Amos. The pictures in the background represent what the brother sees in his imagination as he reads the Bible accounts and meditates on them.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- Why is it important to learn how to study?
- What is the connection between our theme text, Philippians 1:10, and our need for personal study?
- How can you develop an interest in a Bible subject?

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COVER PICTURE:

Parents protect their children from sexual abuse by sharing with them appropriate information about sex. To do so, parents use the information that God’s organization has provided. (See study article 19, paragraphs 19-22)

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